

Andrew's

*HOLY
BIBLE*

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BIBLE

For the Layman —

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FOREWORD

About the Bible, you have often heard someone say:

"I believe every word."

Or,

"I do not believe"

How many of these persons of emphatic opinion, do you think, had read the Book? Probably some of them had studied portions of it — memorized selected verses — heard it discussed — or read books debating or explaining various sections.

But that is not reading the Bible Story. Most English-speaking people have not read it. Why?

Consider its history. First, it was oral, then Hebrew and Greek, then Latin, and finally Old English. Who could have read it, even unto this day, except the specially educated? Even among the clergy, only a few had sufficient training to decipher, with any degree of success, the text of the Hebrew, Greek, Latin, or Old English versions.

Instead, the ministry has been compelled, until the time of very recent modern translations, to limit its activity to explaining, debating, expounding upon, or rationalizing particular passages selected at random from the popular chapters of the whole story.

Unfortunately, by the time the explanation was made, the rationalization argued, or the text praised, the trend of the narrative was lost. The story was never told. The reader or listener was never informed.

* * * * *

You can read this book. Explanations or editorial information interspaced with the text are minimal and set aside from the book itself under the classification "Comment". Ignore "Comment" if you like. Read the story.

Start at the beginning.

There are errors and omissions in the text. Supply any correction you like, continue reading. The writer's interpretation of the text may differ from yours. Substitute your own — proceed. Do not allow debate or criticism upon any part to deter you from your course. Complete your reading of the story.

It is a *single story*. Read it.

Andrew

Comment

ORIGIN OF THE BIBLE

In the beginning was the Word; and the Word was unwritten.

The Bible story is almost totally of oral derivation, the biblical events being first written down generations, centuries, or even thousands of years after the time of their related occurrence. This is particularly true of the contents of the Old Testament.

The history of those years — the creation, Adam and Eve (4004 B.C.), Noah, Abraham (1996 B.C.), Isaac, Jacob, Twelve Tribes, Joseph, Moses, the Exodus from Egypt (1491 B.C.), the invasion of Canaan and settlement of the Promised Land under the judges, Samson, Samuel, rule under Kings Saul, David and Solomon (1012 B.C.), — *the entire period embracing 4004 B.C. to 1000 B.C.* — was preserved solely by oral tradition, whereby one generation by word of mouth delivered to the next generation what they had been told by the previous generation, and so on and on.

The Hebrew called this type of narrative lore "Haggada" which means "Legends".

No Hebrew documents originating in such age have yet been discovered. Nor has an inscription on stone, tablet, or rock been found which could be identified as purporting to relate any of the Hebrew biblical scripture of those times.

It is believed that some writings of Hebrew lore commenced in the early part of the millennium preceding Christ, notwithstanding substantial evidence that Hebrew was an illiterate language until at least 800 B.C. Perhaps first writings were in Aramaic, or Assyrian, or Egyptian. The papyric (crude matted reeds) and vellum (animal skin) scrolls which must have been used for creation of first manuscripts no longer exist. Nor are there copies of significant ancient vintage.

Even so, scholars claim that they are able to date available material based upon content, references, style, etc. The period, 1100-900 B.C., is designated the time of the earliest written accounts of Noah's Blessing (which is said to have occurred about 2400 B.C.), and 900 B.C. the first writing of the story of Jacob's Blessing (which incident allegedly took place 1000 years earlier).

Many of the events in the life of King David, who lived in the 11th Century, were first written only 100 years later; the writings of some of the Elijah adventures were almost contemporaneous with the time of the events, about 700 B.C. In 600 B.C., more tales about Elijah and Elisha were first recorded. Part of the Pentateuch (first five books of the Old Testament), and the work of several prophets, including Amos and Hosea, were first reduced to writing about this time.

Most of these belated fragments of the Ultimate Book should

have, in the course of Hebrew History, been destroyed. The twelve tribes, in settling Canaan, divided themselves into two kingdoms, ten tribes north, and two south. In 722 B.C., the Assyrians destroyed the Northern Kingdom, razed the land, burned its records, and dispersed its people throughout its domain. Any record of the continued existence of these peoples was ended, and they have never been heard from again.

Tiny Judah (the Southern Kingdom) and its holy city, Jerusalem, seemed destined for a similar fate when the armies of Babylon overwhelmed them 145 years later. But a Judean Priest, Ezekiel, prior to his deportation, a slave, to a village near Babylon, salvaged from the Temple some of the works used by the priests in their ministry.

In addition to the compositions already named, there was probably available to Ezekiel some of the history of Israel (Abraham to David), a little of Isaiah I, Deuteronomy's Legal Code, brief texts of Zephaniah, Habakkuk, Micah, Nahum, and Jeremiah, many of the Psalms, and a few of the Proverbs.

Once settled in the new land, Ezekiel parceled out to other priests such fragments of the scripts as he had saved.

The Jews were left alone, for the most part, by their conquerors, and they met together in small groups to receive the reading of the scrolls from the priests. The discussions resulting spurred Haggada expansion, and additions to the books were made by the scribes. Some of the texts were changed by priestly interpretation, interpolation, deletion or addition.

Ezekiel's works made their appearance, in writing, about 590 B.C., as did Jeremiah's Lamentations, and still more Psalms and Proverbs. Contributions were made by unknown scribes to the books of Joshua, Judges, Sameul and Kings. By the year 500 B.C., it is said, there was further contributed to the growing body of Hebrew doctrine Ruth, Jonah, Obadiah, Malachi and Nehemiah.

When the Babylonian kingdom yielded to the legions of the Persian World Empire, 536 B.C., the Jewish exiles were permitted to return to their homeland. A few, under the leadership of Zerubbabel, and later, Priest Ezra, 457 B.C., elected to do so. Now the Hebrew in Egypt wrote the Jew in Jerusalem, the Jew in Jerusalem corresponded with his kin in Persia and Babylon, the clans in Persia exchanged thoughts and Jewish doctrine with their brothers in Syria, and so on; and, as the doctrines were exchanged and explained and taught, the body of the written Word grew. And grew.

Ezra and his priests, their scribes, and their successors proved to be prolific producers. Whereas, Hebrew history and doctrine, in centuries preceding the deportation, were marked by the lack of the written Word for substantiation, the period following the

deportation produced scribe after scribe eager to set forth under his name, or the name of a prophet, king or judge, the historical and religious account of his race. And their writings reflected the influence of the cultures and religions of the Persian, Assyrian, Babylonian, and other peoples to whom they had been subjected and associated.

Among the thousands of other manuscripts produced in the 2nd Century B.C. were Chronicles and Ezra (130 B.C.), more Psalms, and additions to Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel. Some of the books of the minor prophets and Daniel were either written or modified by interpolation. Ecclesiastes and Esther, I and II Maccabees and the other books of the Apocrypha are products of this age.

The abundance of conflicting script, for most of which authenticity was sought by its adherents either by the use of pseudonyms or forgery, created dissension and disturbances among the ranks of the Hebrew. The Greeks, under Alexander, as world rulers deplored the constant turmoil in their Jewish province. Also, there were many Hebrews who spoke and wrote only Greek. Not all of the Yahweh tradition was translated into Greek letters. Uniformity in language and context of the creed was highly desirable.

And so there appeared, somewhere between 1 and 250 B.C., a collection of the Hebrew writings, in Greek, which was to be called "THE SEPTUAGINT".

Who chose from the thousands of pieces of Hebrew material the thirty-nine pieces of literature (The Septuagint) that have become known as the Old Testament to Christian and Jewish faiths?

In that era, and for centuries to come, the explanation offered by Aristeas, bodyguard of King Ptolemy II (Philadelphus), was universally accepted. Aristeas related, in a letter to Philocrates, that the king had commissioned Demetrius Phalerus, Royal Librarian at Alexandria, Egypt (about 280 B.C.), to effect a translation of Hebrew scripture into Greek, that Demetrius at once sought out Eleazar, High Priest in Jerusalem, who in turn selected six well-educated Hebrew-Greek speaking elders from each of the twelve tribes, and sent them to the king in Alexandria.

The king interrogated the elders, together and individually, and scrutinized their qualifications, and having satisfied himself that each of the elders was superior to any Greek philosopher, assigned them to separate living units on the Isle of Pharos, and directed that they translate the Hebrew literature handed them into Greek. At the end of seventy-two days, said the letter of Aristeas, each of the seventy-two elders, without any communication with the others, had completed his translation and each of the seventy-two translations were identical, even as to spelling and punctuation.

Then, according to Aristeas, the Jewish people of that place were assembled, and when the translation had been read to them,

they unanimously asserted the translation was perfect. The material was presented to the king (a pagan) who praised it as God's handiwork and accepted it before the people.

Aristeas' letter, describing the birth of the present day Christian Old Testament, was not challenged for 1600 years. The bishops, teachers, and patriarchs of early Christianity witnessed for the veracity of the letter. Justin wrote that he had been to Pharos, outside Alexandria, and had actually seen the seventy-two houses where each of the elders worked and lived. Eusebius' Ecclesiastical History reported that Irenaeus, Bishop of Lyons, as well as Eusebius himself, accepted the letter in its entirety as valid. So, likewise, did Clement, Cyril of Jerusalem and Epiphanus the Cypriote, and even Origen (the church's most renowned scholar) did not refute it.

Modern critics reject Aristeas. While it is accepted that Greek translations of Hebrew Creed began in the Third Century B.C., under Ptolemy II (Philadelphus), it was during the reign of Ptolemy Philometor in about 100 to 125 B.C. that most, if not all, of the works comprising the Septuagint were translated and assembled.

It is probable that the Septuagint came into being through custom and usage, though not without dispute. Fourteen books of the Septuagint, although bearing the same credentials as other recognized books of the Old Testament, have been unacceptable to the Jew. Greek Orthodox and Roman Catholic faiths have included these books in their Bible for 1800 years, but Protestants, since the 16th Century, have elected to declare that the books (later named Apocrypha) are not of divine inspiration.

The books of the Apocrypha are: Esdras I and II, Tobit, Judith, Esther, Wisdom of Solomon, Ecclesiasticus, Baruch, Letter of Jeremiah, Song of the Three, Daniel and Susanna, Daniel, Bel and the Snake, Prayer of Manasseh, Maccabees I and II.

There were compositions of considerable merit which failed to achieve a "divinely inspired" label in attempts by their advocates to meet the standards applied in those times. These became a part of the thousands of spurious, forged, and inadequate pieces which unsuccessfully sought recognition, known as the Pseudepigrapha.

Some of the better known works of the Pseudepigrapha are: Enoch I and II, Assumption of Moses, Letter of Aristeas, Jubilees, The Twelve, Prayer of Joseph, Testament of Moses, Baruch, Assumption of Abraham.

During the debate as to selection of canonical works, the writing activities of the scribes continued. In the First Century, following the ministry of Jesus, there began the origin and growth of that literature that was to become the New Testament. Among other lesser writings came Paul's Epistles, about 50 to 63 A.D., then

Mark, about 68 A.D., Luke 90 A.D., and Acts of the Apostles, Hebrews, Peter, Jude, James, Timothy, and Titus at century's end. John's Gospel was believed to have originated at 125 A.D., and by that time, and for at least one hundred more years, thousands of verses and hundreds of books were composed which sought, either directly or through forgery or pseudonym, endorsement by the organizing Christian sects.

The names of a few of these rejected manuscripts are: Acts of Andrew, Acts of Thomas, Acts of Peter, Acts of Philip, Gospel of Matthias, Gospel of Barnabas, Gospel of the Apostle Peter, Gospel of Thomas, Gospel of Andrew, Childhood of the Redeemer, Birth of the Redeemer, The Shepherd, Acts of Paul, Revelations of Paul, Homegoing of the Holy Mary, Canons of the Apostles.

The books of the Septuagint, by whomever assimilated, received sanction with the Jewish Synod under Rabbi Akiba at the College of Jabneh at the end of the 1st Century, A.D. Meeting for the purpose of selecting from Hebrew literature those pieces which were to be declared sacred, the Council chose the script of the Septuagint, except for the fourteen books which were much later labeled Apocrypha.

Not all Jews agreed with the Council. The Syriac (2nd Century A.D.), Latin (200 A.D.), Ethiopian (4th Century A.D.), Coptic (2nd Century A.D.), Aquila's (125 A.D.), Aramic (130 A.D.), and many other versions of Old Testament scripture agree generally with the Septuagint script, with significant exceptions. The Jews claimed that many of the versions were attempts by early Christian writers to conform the scripture to the teachings of the new faith; their Talmud, completed in 600 A.D., containing Septuagint works, differ in numerous respects.

Likewise, there was disagreement among the various Christian churches as to the quality and authenticity of the voluminous script, letters, and writings being passed back and forth between the churches. Written or copied principally in Greek, the manuscripts of vellum or papyrus were passed around, or exchanged, hand to hand, church to church, explained, corrected, and, perhaps from time to time, revised. The leaders of these bodies also sought a standard, a "canon".

In 367 A.D., at the Festival of the Epistle of St. Athanasius, the twenty-seven books of the present New Testament appeared together. In 383 A.D., Jerome transcribed to Latin the twenty-seven books, along with the literature comprising the Septuagint. His work was called the Vulgate.

For the next 1,000 years, the sacred scripture of the Christian world was the Vulgate, or some form thereof. True, there was dispute amongst the church hierarchy as to the canonicity of some of the twenty-seven New Testament books selected, particularly Revelations, Hebrews and Timothy, but finally all

were declared to be worthy of Biblical inclusion.

The Hebrew script, in its original form, was written without vowels. In the seventh or eighth century, a group of scholars (Masorah) supplied these vowels. Their text, allegedly transcribed from original Hebrew (also now lost), varies, but not extensively, from texts of the Septuagint and the Vulgate.

Originally, the writings were not divided into chapter and verse. Chapters, designed as a reference aid only, first appeared in the 13th Century, and verses, formed without regard to the sense of a passage, were vitalized two centuries later.

The Latin versions of the Vulgate were used exclusively by the Christian Church until about the 14th Century. Of course, the people couldn't read Latin, and it was a great sin for any of them to attempt to do so.

They relied on the priesthood, who opposed translations into language the common people could read.

Despite condemnation and contempt by his church, John Wycliffe, about 1350 A.D., translated the Vulgate into English. French, Dutch, and German versions were likewise produced; with the advent of the printing press, the priesthood could no longer slow the flow of translated Biblical lore into the hands of Christians eager to read for themselves the mysteries which the priesthood had long described.

The Church tried. When William Tyndale, in 1516, attempted the distribution of his printed English version of the New Testament, he was threatened by royal decree, and his books were burned. He was eventually jailed, then strangled to death, and his body burned at the stake. European pioneer translators were similarly prosecuted.

As more and more books made their appearance, however, church opposition decreased. The English received Miles Coverdale's Bible (1535), works of Thomas Matthew (1537), Great Bible (1539), Geneva Bible and other versions.

By 1600, uniformity and consistency of the scripture in the land of King James was lacking. The King commissioned fifty-four scholars to produce a new translation. Forty-seven of these men, after three years of study and debate, published their efforts. This work became known as:

"The King James or Authorized Version."

The original King James Version contained the books of the Apocrypha. These were deleted in 1629. Revisions of the Book were made in 1762 and 1769, though still written in an artful Archaic English language, difficult to comprehend.

New versions of the ancient texts continue to be produced. Some of these, like the Revised Standard, Living Bible, American Standard, English Revised, or New English Bible versions, are based on additional manuscripts and texts, which were not

available to the translators of former days. The language of the new versions are more easily understood by the reader.

Even so, among the English speaking peoples of the world today, when the word “Bible” is used, it is the King James Version to which reference is made.

GENESIS

1: From an endless empty space of darkness, Yahweh created heaven and earth. On the first day, He created light and separated it from darkness. The next day, He separated the blue of the heavens from the waters.

Then God directed that the waters be gathered in certain places so the dry land would emerge from the sea. And on this third day, He ordained that seed-bearing plants should spring up from that ground. And so it was.

God saw that the earth needed beacons of light for denoting seasons and times of feast and holiday. So He installed the sun to rule the day, and the moon the hours of darkness. Also, He made the stars on this, the fourth day.

On the fifth day, God created the life of the sea, and the birds of the air; and the day after, He made the earth's animals and man and woman.

Then God lay down His work, blessed the seventh day and declared it Holy.

To the East, Yahweh planted the Garden of Eden through which flowed a great river that, ultimately, on its way seaward through lands of gold and precious jewels, separated, becoming the four streams that feed and encompass our land — the Pishon, the Gihon, the Tigris, and the Euphrates. At the garden's center, He set the Tree of Life (whose fruit is life eternal) and the Tree of Knowledge of good and evil. In this splendid creation, God lodged man, with absolute freedom, cautioning him that he was not to eat of the fruit of the Tree of Knowledge.

Then He made woman from one of the ribs of the man. The man, Adam, called the woman Eve.

A serpent induced Eve to eat of the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge; she, in turn, persuaded Adam to taste the forbidden food.

Yahweh was enraged. He willed the serpent to be forever cursed, and the death of man and his mate. To insure the carrying out of the death sentence, He drove them out the garden gate, and there posted a cherubim with menacing sword so that neither of them could re-enter and partake of the fruit of life everlasting from the Tree of Life.

To further punish the pair, Yahweh decreed that man would labor, in sweat and tears, to wrest his sustenance from the uncooperative earth, and the woman to bear children in pain and sorrow.

Soon there was born to Eve two sons, Cain and Abel. As the brothers grew, they, from time to time, offered scarifices to the Lord. But Abel was a shepherd and Cain a farmer, and the Lord received the blood and fat of the lamb of Abel, and rejected Cain's offerings of the soil's harvest.

Cain, angered and jealous, slew his brother Abel. For this the Lord, with a curse, exiled him to the Land of Nod, East of Eden, although at the same time protecting him from harm from others by placing a mark upon him that others would know.

Here is a list of one of the lineal descendants of Adam: Adam, Seth, Enosh, Kenan, Mahalalel, Jared, Enoch, Methuselah, Lamech, and Noah. The time period from Adam to Noah was 1056 years.

6: As the numbers of man increased, it appeared to the Lord that the nature of man leaned to mischief. He decided to destroy all life on earth, except for Noah, a just and pious man.

God directed Noah to build an Ark 450 feet long, 75 feet wide, and 45 feet high. In this Noah cached his wife, three sons (Shem, Ham and Japheth) and their wives, and a pair of each kind of bird, animal and reptile, together with sacrificial animals, grain, food and supplies.

The Heavens opened and rain fell in sheets for forty days and nights. The Ark rode the waves of the flood waters. Several months later, the waters receded and the Ark settled on a mountainside; Noah, his wife, sons, his sons' wives, animals, reptiles and birds, the flood's sole survivors, emerged to once again possess the land.

Then Yahweh promised Noah that He would never send another flood to destroy the earth. He said: "As a reminder of this promise, I send the rainbow. When you see it, you will remember and feel secure."

The sons of Noah, from whom sprang the earth's population, and their descendants scattered throughout the world. Shem's heirs occupied the hills of the East, Mashas to Sephar. Japheth's descendants became the populace of the coastal lands.

The descendants of Ham had a particular problem. Once, as Noah lay naked in a drunken stupor, Ham came upon him. Although Ham quickly reported Noah's condition to his brothers, who promptly covered naked Noah with a blanket without themselves seeing his nakedness, Noah cursed the descendants of Ham, decreeing their subjection to the descendants of Shem and Japheth. Notwithstanding, Ham's offspring lived in Babel, Erech, Accad, Kalneh, Assyria (including Nineveh), Gaza, the coastal lands (Philistia and Phonesia), and the territories of the Jebusites, Amorites, Girgashites, Hirvites, Arkites, Sinaites, Arvadites, Zemarites, and Hamathites.

And the people were different in custom, but with the same language.

In Babel, principal city of Shinar, the descendants of Ham attempted the construction of a tower to Heaven. The Lord, displeased at the unity they displayed in working together, instilled in them different languages. In confusion, the people

withdrew and were separated. In this, and other ways, Noah's heirs were multiplied across the face of the earth.

One of these heirs was Abraham, issue of Terah, born 892 years after the birth of Noah.

Abraham was reared in Ur, near the mouth of the Euphrates River, and, early in life, accompanied his father and other relatives to establish a home at Haran, many miles northwestward of Ur, and about the same distance northeastward from the land of Canaan. When Abraham was grown, and after his father died, he took his wife and nephew, Lot, and Lot's wife, and traveled from Haran into and through the land of Canaan.

12: Abraham would not have left his Haran home, except for Yahweh's persuasions. "If you would leave," God told him, "I will make you a father of Great Nations."

Afterwards, when Abraham, traveling from Ur, was camped at Shechem in the land of Canaan, Yahweh appeared to him and promised, "I will give this land of Canaan to your descendants." And again, when Abraham was camped in the land near Hebron, a good distance southward from Shechem, Yahweh approached him on a mountaintop, saying, "The land of Canaan, as far as you can see, is yours. And I promise you countless descendants." Encouraged by God's frequent appearance and promise, Abraham pressed on.,

Abraham occupied the land near Hebron, living as a nomad throughout the southern portion of Palestine, and from time to time making journeys into Egypt. On one of these trips, Abraham swapped his beautiful wife, Sarai, to the Pharaoh in exchange for sheep, oxen, asses, men and women slaves, and camels, pretending that Sarai was his sister. When the Pharaoh discovered the deceit, he returned Sarai to Abraham and expelled him from Egypt.

Later, when King Abimelech, near the City of Gerar, made inquiries, Abraham lied again about his relationship with Sarai, and traded her to the King. Abimelech subsequently learned that he, too, had been deceived and drove them out.

Meanwhile, Lot had been abducted by one of the many bandit forces which roamed the countryside in those days. Abraham, with 318 men of his household, set out to rescue him.

Overtaking the bandits at Hobah, north of Damascus, he not only liberated Lot, but recovered Lot's possessions. Returning homeward, he was met by Melchizedek, the King of Salem (Jerusalem), High Priest, who blessed him. Abram, in turn, gave Melchizedek a tenth of the captured loot.

God's assurances to Abraham continued. Once, Abraham asked Jehovah for proof. For answer, Jehovah instructed Abraham to kill a three year old heifer, a three year old female

goat, a three year old ram, a turtledove and young pigeon, cut them down the middle, and separate the halves. That night Abram saw a smoking furnace and a flaming lamp pass between the pieces of the butchered animals.

That same day Jehovah made this contract with Abram: that Abraham would receive the territory from the Nile to the Euphrates, for himself and his seed.

"For this, I shall expect," Yahweh told him, "that you and all your descendants, every male, shall circumcise the flesh of your foreskin."

Despite God's assurances to him that his descendants would be more numerous than the stars in the sky, Abram's wife, Sarah, did not conceive. When Abram was eighty-six, Sarah's servant girl, Hagar, gave birth to Abram's child, Ishmael. Finally, when Abraham was one hundred years old, Sarah, at the age of ninety, gave birth to a boy child, whom Abraham named Isaac.

There was little time for celebration. One evening as Jehovah was talking with Abram, He told him that He was thinking about destroying the wicked people of Sodom and Gomorrah. Abraham spoke out in behalf of his kinsman, Lot, who lived in Sodom: "All the people surely aren't bad. If there are as many as fifty righteous people, would you destroy the cities then?"

Jehovah reflected, then answered, "I suppose not."

"Well, how about forty good people?" continued Abram.

"No," said Jehovah, "I won't destroy them if there are forty of the righteous in the two cities."

Abram continued with his bargaining until Jehovah had committed Himself to the proposition that the cities were not to be destroyed even if there were not more than ten deserving of leniency.

19: Nevertheless, that evening at the home of Lot, in the City of Sodom, two angels, disguised as men, sought and received lodging.

Several men (Sodomites) gathered outside Lot's home and rudely insisted that Lot surrender the men, his guests, to them for the purpose of rape. Lot offered his two virgin daughters instead, but the Sodomites refused the girls. Their demands for the men became threats and some of them struck Lot.

The two angels then exclaimed, "Let's leave this city before the Lord destroys it. Don't look back." As Lot and his family were hurrying after the men, they could hear the fire and brimstone raining upon the doomed villages. Lot's wife looked to see. She became a pillar of salt.

Lot and his two daughters, rescued, moved into a cave. There the girls wineed Lot and, when he was drunk, had intercourse with him, each of them, in order, they said, that their father's seed would be preserved. The oldest girl gave birth to Moab, father of

the Moabite nation; the younger girl's child was Benammi, parent of the Ammonite people.

Sarah insisted that Ishmael, Abraham's son by Hagar, be sent away. Abraham yielded, and Hagar took her son into the wilderness of Paran. They survived; later the boy married an Egyptian girl. Abraham had only Isaac left.

22: Still, when Jehovah ordered Abraham to take his son, Isaac, to the mountains and sacrifice him there as a burnt offering, Abram did not hesitate. Upon his arrival at the place chosen, he built an altar, piled wood thereon, and then bound Isaac and laid him across it. As Abraham raised his knife to slay his son, an angel of God spoke to him from Heaven, ordering him to put the weapon aside. Then God promised: "Since you have obeyed Me and have not even withheld from Me your only son, I will bless you, Abraham, and multiply your seed as the stars of heaven or the sand of the shores."

Abraham then discovered an unblemished ram caught in a bush, apprehended it, and sacrificed it on the altar instead of his son.

It was the patriarch's wish that Isaac marry one of his own people rather than a local Canaanite girl. So, after Sarah's death, Abraham dispatched a servant to Haran to find Isaac a wife. The servant sat by a well in Haran, and there met Rebekah, granddaughter of Nahor; after receiving customary consents from Rebekah's family, he brought her to Isaac's camp, where she and Isaac were promptly united.

Abraham died at the age of 175 and was buried in the cave of Mach-Pelah (Sarah's resting place) near Hebron.

Isaac and Rebekah continued the nomad existence in which Isaac had been reared. As Abraham had swapped Sarah, so also did Isaac once trade Rebekah, also to King Abimelech, suffering the same consequences as his father, and Isaac was forced to move, with his family, to Beer-sheba.

26: There was born to Rebekah twin boys, the first born being Esau, distinguished by a covering of reddish hair. The second twin was Jacob, favorite of his mother.

Once, when Esau was hungry, he sold his birthright to Jacob in exchange for food. Shortly thereafter, Jacob pretended to be Esau and obtained his father's blessing (due the oldest child).

Isaac decreed, "God give you fruitful rains, ample harvests, and plenty of corn and wine. May you rule many nations. You are the lord of your brothers. They shall bow down before you. Cursed are they who curse you and blessed is he who blesses you."

When Esau learned that he had been cheated of his birthright, he hated Jacob; Rebekah, fearful of what Esau might do, suggested to Isaac that he send Jacob from their home in order that he may marry a girl of his own family and clan. So Isaac sent

Jacob to Padan-aram, near Haran, to his uncle's home.

When Jacob arrived in the land of the East, he stopped beside a well and, while he tarried there, met Rachel, the daughter of Laban, the son of Nahor (his uncle). Laban had two daughters, Leah, the older, and Rachel. Jacob agreed to work for Laban seven years in exchange for Rachel as his wife. Laban deceived Jacob, however, and on Jacob's wedding night, it was Leah whom Laban sent into the bridal chamber, and with whom Jacob slept and, consequently, received as a wife.

Yet Jacob was so much in love with Rachel that he worked an additional seven years for her, taking her as his second wife.

Rachel had a servant girl, Bilhah, and Leah had a servant girl, Zilpah; Jacob had children by all four women.

Jacob had a small flock of sheep and Laban had a large flock of sheep, but Jacob cared for them both. He had an arrangement with Laban whereby he was to keep the spotted, speckled, and black sheep and Laban was to keep the white sheep. Jacob was careful to mate the healthier, white ewes from Laban's flock with the black rams so that soon Jacob's herd of speckled sheep was much larger and stronger than the herd of Laban.

Laban and his sons became somewhat aloof and even hostile toward Jacob. So Jacob, with his wives and sons, camels, sheep, and stolen idols, fled from the home of Laban and began the journey to the home of his father, Isaac, in the land of Canaan.

Laban chased after them, overtook them, and after he had searched their belongings without finding the stolen idols, made peace. Jacob and Laban swore to each other that each would not attack the other.

32: As Jacob journeyed southward, he received word that his brother, Esau, was on the way to meet him with an army of 400 men. (During Jacob's absence, Esau, realizing that his father disapproved intermarriage of their race with the nearby peoples, had married two of his Uncle Ishmael's daughters and had acquired family and possessions through his own efforts.)

Jacob, frantic with fear, devised a plan to appease Esau. He arranged to present gifts to his brother — nanny goats, billy goats, ewes, rams, milk camels, cows, bulls, donkeys, male and female — and divided them into small droves and instructed his servants to maintain a space between droves as they advanced. In this way, the procession of gifts reached Esau ahead of Jacob, who had stationed himself at the rear of his caravan. When he finally saw Esau approaching, he arrayed his family into a column of twos behind him, approached his brother and bowed low seven times before him.

Esau enthusiastically embraced Jacob and invited him to his home. Jacob declined, saying he would meet Esau at Seir. Instead,

Jacob, still fearful, lagged behind and settled at Shechem with his family.

Dinah, Leah's daughter, was raped by Shechem, son of King Hamor. Apologetically, the young man and his father approached Jacob and his sons with the request that Shechem be permitted to marry Dinah. Dinah's brothers suggested to Shechem and Hamor that if they and the townspeople would become circumcised they would not only permit the marriage, but the peoples of their clan would thereafter intermarry with the people there.

Hamor and Shechem were relieved and elated. They persuaded the men of the village to become circumcised. Three days later, while the townsmen were defenseless by virtue of their sore wounds, two of Dinah's brothers, Simeon and Levi, sword in hand, entered the city without opposition and slaughtered every man. They pillaged the village and took the women and children captive.

Jacob was concerned that adjacent tribesmen would become aroused over the incident. He feared their vengeance. Jehovah advised Jacob that he should move to Bethel and build his altar there.

So Jacob told those in his household to put their idols aside and pack. Then the families moved to Bethel. There Jehovah came to Jacob again and said: "You will no longer be called Jacob, but Israel, and you shall be fruitful, the father of a great nation which will occupy the land of Canaan."

Here are the names of the twelve sons of Jacob:

Of Leah: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun.

Of Rachel: Joseph, Benjamin.

Of Zilpah: Gad, Asher.

Of Bilhah: Dan, Naphtali.

The descendants of Esau, brother of Jacob, became the Edomites.

Judah married a Canaanite girl and, by her, had three sons, Er, Onan, and Shelah.

Er was killed by the Lord just after he had married a girl named Tamar. His brother, Onan, then married Tamar according to custom (her sons by Onan would become Er's heirs). Onan did not want a child not legally his own and so, when he slept with Tamar, he withdrew from her before discharge of his semen in order that she would not become pregnant by him. So the Lord killed Onan, too.

Judah then sent Tamar home, but she subsequently disguised herself and seduced him. By him, she had twin sons, Perez and Zerah.

37: Of his twelve sons, Jacob favored the sons of Rachel, Joseph and Benjamin. Joseph's brothers resented this preference and so, when Joseph came to visit them as they toiled in the fields

one day, they seized him and sold him as a slave to traders bound for Egypt. Jacob had given Joseph a multi-colored coat. The brothers took this coat, spattered it with goat's blood, and returned it to Jacob as proof that Joseph had been killed by an animal.

Meanwhile, in Egypt, the traders sold Joseph to Potiphar, an officer of the Pharaoh.

Joseph was an efficient supervisor, helpful to Potiphar in the management of the home and business. He was favored by Potiphar, until one day Potiphar's wife attempted to seduce him. When Joseph refused to sleep with her, she reached for him, and as he pulled himself from her, his coat came off in her hands. She screamed and, when help arrived, reported that Joseph had attempted to rape her. Joseph was cast into prison.

While in prison, Joseph interpreted the dreams of the prisoners. When the Pharaoh of Egypt had a recurring dream to which his advisors could give no meaning, he sent for Joseph, having heard of Joseph's reputation in interpreting dreams. Joseph informed the Pharaoh that his dream meant seven years of prosperity, followed by seven years of famine. Then Joseph suggested a plan for the storing of the excess crops during the period of prosperity and their distribution during the period of famine.

The Pharaoh was so impressed that he appointed Joseph administrator of the work, placed his own ring on Joseph's finger as a token of authority, dressed him in fine linen and a golden necklace, gave him a chariot denoting him the Pharaoh's officer, and placed him in command of the land of Egypt. He also gave Joseph a wife, the daughter of Potiphara, a priest of Heliopolis (priest of the sun god, Re). From this marriage there were born two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim.

42: The famine came.

Joseph's ten older brothers, during the famine, came to Egypt for corn. They did not recognize Joseph, although he knew them at once. Joseph accused them of spying, imprisoned them for three days, then released nine of the brothers (keeping Simeon as a hostage), admonishing the nine to return promptly, bringing the younger brother, Benjamin, with them.

When the brothers arrived home and told Jacob what had occurred, Jacob was afraid to return to Egypt. But the famine continued, and, in desperation, Jacob (who was also called Israel) relented. All the brothers, including Benjamin, journeyed once again to Egypt. Joseph greeted them icily, but gave them grain. In their grain sacks, his servants hid money. In Benjamin's sack, the servants placed a silver cup.

Just out of the city, the brothers were stopped by Joseph's men, searched, and accused of stealing. Returned to Joseph, they began explaining their hard times and pleading their innocence to

taking or stealing money or the silver cup. In the midst of his rebuking them, Joseph broke into tears and announced his identity. The tears became smiles and laughter as the brothers reunited. Joseph forgave them for having sold him into slavery.

Joseph released them all, inviting them to return with their father and relatives. He promised that they would be cared for in Egypt. Jacob (Israel) was at first afraid to go. Yahweh came to him and told him not to be afraid, that He would be with him in Egypt, make him and his offspring into a great nation, and bring them out again.

46: With this assurance, Jacob, with his family, sixty-six in all, and his servants, emigrated their Beer-sheba home to the land of the Pharaoh. When they arrived there, Joseph promptly presented Jacob to his king, who received him warmly. The Pharaoh permitted Joseph to allocate to Jacob and his family the land of Rameses (Goshen).

When the immigrants had settled themselves, Joseph brought his two sons, Manasseh, the oldest, and Ephraim, before Israel, seeking his blessing. Although the older boy was on his right, Israel crossed his arms when giving the blessing so that the right hand lay on the head of Ephraim, the younger boy.

One day Jacob gathered his sons around him, made prophecies and declarations with regard to them, requested that he be buried in the burial plot Abraham purchased at Hebron, and died. The loss was ceremonially mourned for more than four months by Joseph and his brothers. Then, with the Pharaoh's permission, Joseph delivered the body of Jacob to the cave of Mach-pelah, near Hebron, where he was laid to rest.

50: With Jacob dead, the fear returned to the brothers of Joseph that they would be punished by Joseph for the wrong that they had done him long ago. Joseph assured them, however, that he meant them no harm — that he would care for them — and he did so. He told his brothers that upon his death he wished to be returned to the land of Canaan.

So Joseph died at the age of 110, and they embalmed him, and he was placed in a coffin in Egypt.

Comment

Who wrote Genesis?

Traditionalists credit Moses with authorship of the first five books of the Bible. As to the recording of the events in Genesis, which were said to have occurred hundreds of years before the time of Moses, they claim that Moses (1) received this information directly from God, or (2) wrote it with aid of "divine inspiration"

In the Book, Moses nowhere recites that he authored the Genesis history. The accounts given therein relate his recording God's commandments and priestly code, specifications for construction of the Tabernacle, the account of the flight of the Israelites from Rameses, Egypt, to the lowlands of Moab, and even a song celebrating their escape, but declarations that Moses was involved in the writing of historical happenings of Genesis prior to his time are lacking.

Persistently, fundamentalists point out that Moses, educated in an Egyptian palace where writing was well known, was well qualified for the task. Certainly, adjacent civilizations (Egypt, Persia, Assyria, Babylon) in that era were busily recording their accomplishments by writings upon stone, tablet, or rock, many of which remain to this day.

Yet, no such evidence exists with regard to Moses, the Israelite history, or their scripture. Did Moses initiate oral legends which became a part of the Haggada adopted by scribes in later generations?

It is contended by learned men who have studied the history, language, and writings of those times that more than twenty-five different authors, over a period of several hundred years, contributed to the first five books, including Genesis.

Older religions have creation accounts similar to those found in Genesis. The aged civilizations of the East, to which the Hebrew was subjected, also employed an account of the flood which compared with Genesis' own narrative.

Fundamentalists argue that such similar stories are evidence of the facts of which their Bible speaks.

The arguments persist, To this extent, all parties to the controversies agree: the verses of the five books which import occurrences following the death of Moses were not written by him.

EXODUS

1: Jacob took seventy relatives into Egypt. His descendants were fruitful, and soon filled the land of Goshen. Though a new king to the throne of Egypt placed the Israelis in bondage, forcing them to work long hours in the hot fields and sweat and strain in making quotas of mortar and brick, their numbers continued to increase.

The Pharaoh, concerned about their rapid population growth, first told the mid-wives to kill the Hebrew boys at birth (the mid-wives didn't), and then decreed that the people should cast new-born Hebrew boys into the river.

To escape the order, a Levite and his Levite wife hid their just born son in their home for three months. Then, when discovery at home seemed certain, the mother made a small boat from bulrushes, in which she placed the infant child, and hid it among the grasses at the banks of the Nile.

The Pharaoh's daughter discovered the ark. The princess selected a Hebrew woman (the baby's mother) to nurse the child until the child was older; then he was returned to the princess and the palace. The princess called the child Moses.

One day Moses, in early manhood, observed an Egyptian abuse one of his Hebrew brothers; he intervened, slaying the Egyptian. Fearing discovery, he fled into the land of Midian, near Mt. Horeb. (Mt. Sinai).

There, as Moses was sitting beside a well, seven girls, daughters of the priest of Midian, came to draw water for their father's flocks. Moses helped them water their sheep and the girls, upon prompting by their father, invited him into their home. The host was Reuel (Jethro, priest of Midian), who gave to Moses one of his daughters, Zipporah, for wife.

3: Once Moses was shepherding the sheep of Jethro at the rear of the desert, near Horeb, when he noticed that a bush burned without being consumed, and he turned aside to inspect it. God called out to him:

"Remove your shoes for you are standing on holy ground. I am Yahweh, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. I have seen the miseries of my people in Egypt. I have heard their cries for deliverance from their oppressors. I have come to save them from the Egyptians. I will lead them into a land flowing with milk and honey, the land now occupied by the Canaanites, Hittites, Amorites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites."

Yahweh explained to Moses that He was sending him to Egypt to lead His people out.

Moses protested, "I'm not the right person for the task. The people will not listen to me. Can't You send someone else?" Yahweh persisted. He reassured Moses, "You are the one to do this important work." Then Yahweh demonstrated that the

shepherd's rod could become a serpent, and that the Nile River could become blood.

Moses still resisted: "Yahweh, You know that I do not speak very well — even to try is difficult, with my speech defect."

Yahweh answered impatiently: "Enough — your brother, Aaron, is a good speaker. Let him be your spokesman."

Yahweh informed Moses that those in Egypt who wanted to kill him had died and that now it was safe to return. He urged Moses to persevere in his efforts, though the Pharaoh might refuse him. "I," said Yahweh, will harden the Pharaoh's heart so that at first he will not let the people go."

Moses loaded his wife and sons on an ass and departed for Egypt, carrying the "rod of God" in his hand.

On the way to Egypt, Moses and his family were camped when Jehovah met Moses and attempted to kill him. Moses' wife, Zipporah, cut off the foreskin of her son's penis with a sharp stone and tossed it at Moses' feet. God then stopped threatening Moses.

Aaron met Moses at Mt. Horeb and they returned to Egypt together, reporting to the elders Yahweh's conversations with Moses and showing them the miracles. Reverently, all gave thanks.

5: The next day Moses and Aaron approached Pharaoh, and demanded: "Jehovah commands you to permit the people of Israel to make a trip into the wilderness for a religious feast of three days." The demand angered the Pharaoh and he not only refused but he added to the work load of the Israelites. The commands of the slavemasters became louder and the lash of the whip was more frequently felt by the slaves as the Egyptians encouraged them to perform more work.

The people then refused to listen to Moses.

The Lord ordered Moses to renew his requests of the Pharaoh (explaining that He would cause the Pharaoh to refuse, giving rise to the need for signs and miracles which would bring fame to Him). Aaron and Moses again appeared before the ruler, and this time Aaron dropped his rod at the Pharaoh's feet (as Jehovah had instructed him), and the rod became a serpent. The Pharaoh called in his sorcerers (magicians) and their rods became serpents, too. Pharaoh refused them.

The next day, at Yahweh's command, Moses and Aaron were back again. On Aaron's gesture, the magnificent Nile became a river of blood. Its water became foul throughout its length, and bloated fish lay stinking upon its surface. The Pharaoh was unimpressed. He called in his magicians who, likewise, turned water into blood. Moses and Aaron were refused again.

A few days later, Moses and Aaron appeared before the Pharaoh. Aaron pointed his rod and frogs emerged from the rivers

and streams and covered the nation. But, likewise, the magicians of the court acted and they, too, caused frogs to come upon the land. Pharaoh plead with Moses and Aaron to remove the frogs; they then killed the frogs. Even then the Pharaoh refused the Hebrews their requested three day holiday.

Moses and Aaron infested the entire countryside with lice, a feat which the magicians of the court could not accomplish. The Pharaoh still said no, he would not let the people go for their three-day feast in the wilderness.

Yahweh sent swarms of flies throughout Egypt (except the land of Goshen where the Israelis lived). The Pharaoh promised that Moses and the clans could have their three-day trip if Moses would remove the flies. Moses agreed, and the Lord removed the flies. But Pharaoh changed his mind and said no, he would not let the people go.

Next day, Jehovah sent a death plague upon the cattle of the Egyptians (none of the Israelite cattle in the land of Goshen were stricken). The Pharaoh still refused.

Moses sprinkled ashes in the air, which ashes became boils and broke out upon all the people of Egypt, except the Israeli; but the Pharaoh still refused their request for three days off.

Yahweh sent thunder, hail and fire upon the Egyptians. Everything in the fields was killed, whether man or animal, and the crops were completely destroyed. There was no hail or damage in the land of Goshen where the people of Israel lived. The Pharaoh agreed that if Moses would have Yahweh stop the hail, he would let Moses and his people go. Moses, lifting his hands heavenward, stopped the storm.

But Pharaoh refused to let the people leave (Yahweh had told Moses that He had hardened Pharaoh's heart in order that He could display His power, and so reflect upon His glory).

Again Moses and Aaron, upon command of Yahweh, appeared before the Pharaoh, this time threatening a plague of locusts should the Pharaoh disallow their application for a religious holiday. The Pharaoh ignored the warning. The locusts came and ate all the vegetation that the hail had left. Every tree, every plant throughout the land of Egypt was obliterated. At the Pharaoh's request and his promise to grant them leave, Moses caused the locusts to be blown away into the Red Sea. Again the Pharaoh reneged; he refused to let the people go.

Moses, on instructions of Jehovah, caused darkness in the land of Egypt for three days (except for the land of Goshen), and the Pharaoh began to weaken. He first suggested that they take off the three days, but leave their children. Then, when Moses declined this offer, he proposed that they could have the holiday, but without their flocks and herds. Moses' rebuttal was that they had to take their flocks and herds in order to make sacrifices and

burnt offerings to Jehovah. So the Pharaoh said no, he would not let them go.

Moses announced to Pharaoh: "Egyptian firstborn shall die, even animal firstborn. None of the people of Israel, nor any of their animals, shall be stricken."

Then Yahweh told Moses: "On the tenth day of this month, each family shall secure a year-old male sheep or goat having no defects, kill the animal on the fourteenth day of the month, and smear its blood on the two side posts of, and the door post above, the door of their home. That night everyone shall eat roast lamb or goat with unleavened bread and bitter herbs. If all is not eaten, the remainder shall be burned.

"Eat quickly and have your belongings gathered to leave.

"I will see the blood on the door posts as I pass through the land, and I will pass over you and your first-born children when I smite the land of Egypt.

"This day shall become an annual holiday. It shall be a seven-day period, and during that time you shall eat unleavened bread. There shall be no work done."

The people followed God's instructions. That night Jehovah killed all the first-born sons in the land of Egypt and the first-born cattle (except for the first-born of the marked homes of the Hebrews).

The awful cries of anguish from loved ones of the dead reached the Pharaoh's ears. His household, too, felt Yahweh's breath of death. He called in Moses and Aaron and urged them to leave Egypt.

The slaves stole and borrowed from their Egyptian masters vast quantities of silver, gold, jewelry and clothing. With this plunder and all their own possessions, the people of Israel, six hundred thousand of them, in addition to the women and children, began their exit from Egypt. Animals, fowl, large flocks and herds of cattle were included in their caravan

The children of Israel had lived in Egypt 430 years.

Yahweh gave these rules to Moses and Aaron concerning observance of the Passover. "Strangers to your race shall not eat the lamb and observe the Passover (except circumcised slaves). The hired servants shall not participate. Circumcised visitors of your household may celebrate with you. The bones of the lamb shall not be broken.

"The first-born, man and animals, of Israel are mine. You must buy back your first-born sons. A first-born donkey may be redeemed with a lamb or baby goat, but if you do not offer the lamb or goat, you shall break the neck of the ass."

Jehovah brought the Israelis from the land which He had devastated through the Red Sea wilderness, leading them by a

pillar of Cloud during the daytime and by a pillar of Fire at night.

Moses took the bones of Joseph with them.

14: When the Israelis had been gone three days and the King of Egypt realized that they were not coming back, he, with his army, including at least six hundred chariots, pursued them.

When the Israelis saw the Egyptians overtaking them, they cowered in fear, and whined that Moses had led them astray. While the angel of God moved the Cloud behind the people of Israel so that it lay as a barrier between them and the Egyptians, Moses stretched his rod toward the water of the Red Sea, and the sea opened, leaving a roadway across it.

That night the Cloud was a one-sided pillar of Fire, leaving the Egyptians in darkness, but giving light to the bewildered slaves. For a while, a strong east wind blew across the strip of land from which the waters had receded, drying the sea bottom. Moses' followers walked across the sea on dry ground between walls of water. When the Israelis reached the other side, Moses stretched out his hands toward the sea again. The waters joined, engulfing those Egyptians who had attempted to follow. Of the Pharaoh's army, there was not one survivor.

The freed slaves paused by the Red Sea, rejoiced, and sang songs of praise to the Lord. Then they entered the wilderness of Shur, soon arriving at Marah (where they couldn't drink the bitter water until it had been treated by Moses), and then on to Elim where they encamped by the twelve water wells and seventy palm trees.

In journeying through the Sihn Wilderness, between Elim and Mt. Sinai, the people became tired and hungry. They complained. Jehovah told Moses not to be concerned because He, the Lord, would rain down bread and meat from Heaven.

Moses gave this information to the people. Sure enough, that evening innumerable coveys of quail flew into camp and were quickly captured. In the morning the ground was wet with dew. When the dew evaporated it left small rounded bits of something like hoarfrost. The Israelites called it manna, went forth, gathered and ate some of it. Moses told them not to leave it overnight, but some did. The next morning, the manna left overnight was thick with worms and stank.

Each day, the people gathered this manna in the morning and during the day when the sun became hot the food melted away. On the sixth day, they gathered twice as much as usual, six quarts each, and the food that was left overnight for the seventh day was wholesome (it had not melted).

(The manna was furnished to them for forty years, but when they later arrived in Canaan, it no longer appeared.)

At God's command, the emancipated crossed the Sihn Wilderness, arriving in Rephidim. There was no water. God said

to Moses: "Lead the people to the foot of Mt. Horeb (Mt. Sinai) and strike a rock with your rod. Water will come forth." This Moses did and, as Yahweh had said, the water came bubbling from the ground. From this spring, the thirst of 600,000 men, their women, children, cattle and stock, was satisfied.

The invading Israelis were now encroaching upon lands occupied by peoples. The warriors of Amalek came out in an attempt to drive them away. Joshua organized his men and marched them onward against the desert tribesmen who were defending their territories. Moses, Aaron, and Hur sat on the top of a hill watching the battle.

When Moses held up the rod in his hand, Israel was winning, but when he brought the rod down, resting his arms, the Amalek forces prevailed. When Moses' arms became tired, Aaron and Hur stood on each side holding up his hands. The forces of Amalek were defeated.

That day, Yahweh promised Moses that He would exterminate the Amalekites.

18: While Moses was living at Mt. Sinai with the Israeli people, his father-in-law, Jethro, journeyed from nearby Midian to see him. He observed Moses as Moses attempted to administer to the disputes of the people, and suggested the appointment of judges and sub-judges, with final disagreements between the judges or disputes concerning large matters being appealed to Moses himself. So Moses chose able men as judges over the people, thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens. These arbiters were able to decide minor arguments, but brought important and difficult controversies to Moses.

Yahweh told Moses:

"If you Israelis believe Me and obey Me, you shall be My own choice from all the nations. You shall be a kingdom of priests to Me."

And, a little later,

"I will come to you within a thick Cloud on Mt. Sinai. The people will hear Me when I talk to you, but the people may not go on or near the mountain; whoever does shall be stoned or pierced through with spear or arrows until he dies. When you hear the blast of the ram's horn, meet at the mountain's edge."

Moses delivered this message to the people, and instructed them to wash their clothing and refrain from sexual intercourse with their wives in preparation for this meeting with God.

At dawn of the third day, the huge Cloud descended upon the mountain. Thunder rolled, lightning flashed, the earth shook, the trumpets blared, Moses spoke and Yahweh answered. Moses ascended to the top of the mountain to meet God.

There Yahweh instructed Moses to retrace his steps to the assembled people to warn them, upon threat of death, against

climbing the mountain during the talks (despite Moses' assurance to Him that the people had already been told and wouldn't dare approach their meeting place), and that, on his return, he should bring Aaron up with him. Moses obeyed.

20: Then God declared:

"I am Jehovah, who freed you from your Egyptian bondage.

"Thou shalt have no other gods before Me.

"Thou shalt not worship any graven image.

"Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain.

"Remember the Sabbath Day, to keep it holy.

"Honor thy Father and thy Mother.

"Thou shalt not kill.

"Thou shalt not commit adultery.

"Thou shalt not steal.

"Thou shalt not bear false witness.

"Thou shalt not covet anything that is thy neighbors.

"Build simple altars of earth or stone; and, if from stone, the stone shall not be hewn. Make altars without steps so that you do not expose the nakedness of your body to those who watch.

"An Hebrew slave shall serve six years and in the seventh year shall have his freedom. If the slave was married before he became a slave, his wife shall go with him. Otherwise, she and the children remain in servitude. If the slave says that he does not want to be free, then he shall be brought before the judges and his ear bored with an awl, to become a slave forever.

"If a man's son marries a Hebrew girl, the man shall deal with the girl as a daughter. If one marries a slave and then marries again, he may not cut his allowance to her or fail to sleep with her, for if he does, she may leave at will, without any compensation.

"Intentional striking and killing a man shall be punishable by death. Striking one's father or mother, or cursing them, is punishable by death. Shanghaier's shall be executed.

"If one man is injured in a fight, the other shall pay his medical expenses and his loss of time. If two men are fighting and one strikes a pregnant woman who miscarries and dies, the man shall be executed; but if the woman lives, but miscarries, the man shall be fined an amount fixed by the woman's husband (subject to the judges' determination).

"Should a man repeatedly strike his slave so that the slave dies immediately, the man shall be punished; if the slave lives for two days or more before dying, the man shall not be punished.

"If a man fighting another strike a pregnant woman and her eye is injured, his shall be injured likewise, and she lose a tooth, then his must be taken, and so on, hand for hand, wound for wound, or foot for foot.

"A slave shall be freed if his master smite him causing loss of eye or tooth.

“An ox shall be stoned if it gores and kills a man or woman. The owner of the ox shall be executed if he knew of the ox’s previous history of goring people. But if the ox pierce a slave, the ox shall be stoned and the slave’s owner given thirty pieces of silver.”

In addition to the delivery to Moses of the Ten Commandments and the foregoing laws, Yahweh submitted to Moses laws, rules, and guidelines for instances of theft of sheep or oxen, burglary, stealing, damages due for negligence in damaging another’s crops or oxen, bailment, seduction of a virgin, sorcery, sexual relations with animals, sacrificing to gods other than Yahweh, oppression of strangers, vexation of widows or orphans, lending, rapes, blasphemy of the Gods, cursing government officials, tithing, eating dead animals, becoming false witness in court, assisting neighbors (including an owner or enemy who is attempting to assist a donkey onto its feet beneath a heavy load), poverty, false charges, mobs, bribery, rotation of crops (resting the land for the seventh year), and the avoidance of mentioning the names of other gods.

Next morning, Moses built an altar at the foot of the mountain and made sacrifices to Yahweh. He threw half the blood of the sacrificed animals against the altar and the other half he sprinkled among the people of Israel, saying: “Behold, the Blood of the Covenant, a seal of the contract between Yahweh and His people by which we are pledged to obey His laws.”

Comment

According to the Exodus account, Moses, standing on the summit of Mt. Sinai, received from Yahweh the Ten Commandments and the laws of the Book of the Covenant. More than six hundred years before that, a Babylonian king was dictating the inscription of most of those same laws upon a black stone pillar in the ancient City of Susa (Persia).

The pillar, seven feet, four inches high, and about five and one-half feet around, unearthed in 1897, now resting in a Paris museum, is covered, back and front, with writing known as archaic cuneiform (Babylonian Hieroglyphics).

The king, Hammurabi, after spending a good portion of the writing area of the stone on eulogies to himself, Anus, the Supreme, and Bel, the Sun God, proceeds to set forth laws under which his subjects will live. Called the Hammurabi Code, the writings, or what is left of them, are laws, rules, and guidelines for instances of theft of sheep or oxen, burglary, stealing, damages due for negligence in damaging another's crops or oxen, bailment, seduction, rape, false charges, bribery, remedies for injuries to others while engaging in fighting, treatment of slaves, etc.

The clans of the Habiru, Nomadic tribesmen of the East, who, from time to time, invaded Canaan, lived under similar laws engraved on stone. By the 6th and 7th centuries, B.C., Assyrians were teaching the Code and its modifications in special schools.

Mr. Chilperis Edwards in his book, *The Hammurabi Code*, sets forth the verses of Exodus and the verses of the Code for comparison.

Comparing Exodus, Chapter 21, verses 1-31 of Chapter 22, and verses 1-3 and 6-8 of Chapter 23, setting forth the laws of the Book of the Covenant on the subjects just described, with Hammurabi's Code, Edwards concludes that the sum of the verses are similar, many are identical, and others are in complete agreement, each with the other, or are subject to slight modification.

Examples:

(1) Exodus, XXI, 18: "And if men strive together and one smite another with a stone or with his fist, and he die not, but keepeth his bed:

"19: If he arise again, and walk abroad upon his staff, then shall he that smote him be quit: only he shall pay for the loss of his time, and shall cause him to be thoroughly healed."

The Hammurabi Code, sec. 206: "If a man has struck another man in a dispute and wounded him, that man shall swear, 'I did not strike him knowingly'; and he shall pay for the doctor."

(2) Exodus, XXI, 28: "If an ox gore a man or woman, that they die: then the ox shall be surely stoned, and his flesh shall not be eaten; but the owner of the ox shall be quit."

The Code, 250: "If a mad bull has rushed upon a man, and gored him, and killed him: that case has no remedy."

(3) Exodus, XXII, 10: "If a man deliver unto his neighbor an ass, or an ox, or a sheep, or any beast, to keep; and it die, or be hurt, or driven away, no man seeing it:

"11: Then shall an oath of the Lord be between them both, that he hath not put his hand unto his neighbor's goods; and the owner of it shall accept thereof, and he shall not make it good."

The Code, 266: "If a stroke of God has occurred in a fold, or a lion has slain, then the herdsman shall clear himself before God, and the owner of the fold shall meet the disaster to the fold."

(4) Exodus, XXII, 12: "And if it be stolen from him, he shall make restitution unto the owner thereof."

The Code, 263: "If he has lost ox or sheep that has been entrusted to him, he shall replace ox by ox, sheep by sheep, to the owner."

Whether one agrees with Mr. Edwards or not, the practical, earthy aspect of the laws which Moses is said to have received are obvious. They are similar, at least, to the laws under which neighboring peoples lived for generations before and after Moses' time.

Did one of the authors of Exodus embellish the Hebrew law with a dramatic account of Yahweh's delivery of it to the legendary Moses?

* * * * *

God further instructed the people of Israel through Moses: "Here are the three annual feasts honoring Me that you must keep:

"(1) Feast of unleavened bread (seven days, eat no bread with yeast, a March holiday).

"(2) Harvest Feast (I am due your first fruits).

"(3) Feast of Ingathering (end of harvest)."

Then Yahweh promised that an angel would lead the people of Israel into the land of Canaan, exterminating, as the invasion progressed, the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Canaanites, Hivites, and Jebusites who lived there.

Yahweh ordered the Israelites to obey the angel. "Once subjection of a nation is effected," He warned, "you will not serve the gods of such other peoples, nor shall you permit the Canaanites to live among you."

Afterwards, Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu (Aaron's sons), and seventy of the elders of Israel climbed the mountain and, on its summit, dined together in the presence of Yahweh, who presided from a sapphire chair; all of them saw Him.

Moses remained alone on the cloud-shrouded mountaintop for forty days and forty nights.

25: Yahweh instructed Moses to tell the people of Israel to make an Ark from shittim wood, 3-3/4 feet long, 2-1/4 feet wide, and 2-1/4 feet high, overlaid inside and out with pure gold, with gold crown on its edges. He explained how they should make four gold rings and carrying staves overlaid with pure gold, by which poles, inserted into the rings, could support the Ark containing the tablets of stone upon which was written the Ten Commandments.

The top of the Ark was to be pure gold, 3-3/4 feet long and 2-1/4 feet wide. It was the Mercy Seat. The design at each end of the Seat was an angel image of beaten gold, the angels facing each other with eyes focused upon the Seat. Yahweh directed (through Moses) that the people make a table of wood 3 feet long, 1-1/2 feet wide, and 2-1/4 feet high, overlaid with pure gold, with golden rings and staves attached to facilitate its transportation. He ordered that golden dishes, spoons, pitchers, and utensils be set upon the table, next a lamp stand of pure beaten gold with six branches and seven lamps.

Then Yahweh explained how they were to sew a Tabernacle tent from ten curtains of fine-twined linen, 42 feet long and 6 feet wide, dyed blue, purple and scarlet, to form the side and tent ends, across which they would install the roof of the Tabernacle, made with eleven goat hair covers, each 45 feet across and 6 feet wide. On top of these blankets, there was to be placed a layer of rams' skins, dyed red, and then, for the top layer, badger skins.

The support was to be formed of shittim wood, forty-eight frame pieces, fifteen feet high and two and one-fourth feet wide, with

eighty silver sockets for the posts to fit into; twenty boards on the north side, twenty on the south, and six on the west, with two main posts anchoring each corner. These were to receive a gold overlay.

The Israelis were to fashion a veil from blue, purple and scarlet cloths, fine-twined linen, decorated with embroidered angels. This was to be draped from four golden hooks upon four golden covered wooden pillars, set in silver sockets. On one side of the curtain was the Most Holy Place, and on the other the Holy Place. The Ark was placed in the Most Holy Place.

Yahweh instructed that the Israelis should frame a square altar, 7-1/2 feet wide, 4-1/2 feet high. Horns were to be secured to each of the four corners, and when the altar was complete, it was to be covered with brass. Accessories, including corner grating and rings, were to be sculptured in brass.

Yahweh ordered the walls for the formation of the Tabernacle courtyard to be 150 feet long by 75 feet wide, hung with fine-twined linen, 7-1/2 feet high on brass overlaid pillars 7-1/2 feet apart. The gate was to be a 30 foot wide curtain of blue, purple and scarlet linen. Pure olive oil was to be burned in the lamps. Yahweh prescribed that Aaron and his sons constantly tend the flame in the outer Holy Room, day and night, in honor of Him.

28: Yahweh also directed the fabrication of beautiful garments for Aaron and his sons, the priests of God, saying: "There shall be these garments — breastpiece, ephod, robe, broidered coat, mitre, and girdle.

"The ephod and girdle shall be fashioned of the same fine-twined linen, the two pieces of the ephod, front and back, being blue, purple and scarlet, and the girdle being gold, blue, purple and red. Two onyx stones with the names of the tribes of Israel thereon shall be sewn on the shoulders of the ephod. A breastplate upon which four rows of stones (ruby, topaz, emeralds, sapphire, diamond, amber, agate, amethyst, onyx, beryl and jasper set in gold settings) are fastened shall highlight the ensemble. Affix the bottom of the breasplate to the ephod by blue lace, and the top by golden cord.

"The Urim and Thummim shall be deposited in a pocket over Aaron's heart; gold bells shall dangle from the bottom of the robe. A gold plate shall be attached to Aaron's mitre (hat) on which shall be engraved the words 'Holiness to Jehovah' (consequently the plate will bear the guilt connected with mistakes in making the people's gifts). Complete Aaron's priestly dress with coat and embroidered girdle. He shall wear linen underclothes.

"Aaron and his sons are to wear these clothes when they enter the Tabernacle or attend the altar in the Holy Place; otherwise, they shall die."

"Now," Yahweh told Moses, "you must dress Aaron and his

sons in these garments in a consecration ceremony before the altar at the Tabernacle. Bring a bullock to the Tabernacle. Aaron and his sons shall place their hands upon its head, and you, Moses, shall kill it before Me at the doorway. With your finger, place some of the victim's blood on the ground in front of the altar; burn the carcass, including the skin and the dung, outside the camp. Burn the fat, the kidneys, and the gallbladder upon the altar. Kill, also, a ram and offer its blood in much the same way. Then remove some of the blood from the altar, take some of the anointing oil, and sprinkle it upon the clothing and flesh of Aaron and his sons.

"Aaron and his sons shall have the breast and shoulder of the ram; by statute forever, the people of Israel shall give to Aaron and his descendants. They shall eat the meat and bread at the door of the Tabernacle. For each of seven days you shall sacrifice a young bull as a sin offering and one yearling lamb in the morning, one in the evening, and flour, oil, and wine.

"This shall be a daily offering, generation after generation, at the door of the Tabernacle. I, Yahweh, will meet with My children there. I will dwell with the Israelites and be their God. I delivered them from Egypt so that I could live among them.

"Place a small altar in the Holy Place so that each day Aaron shall burn sweet incense for Me. Once each year Aaron shall redeem the horns of the altar by sprinkling them with the blood of the sin offering.

"Make a brass washbowl and place it between the Tabernacle and the altar in order that Aaron and his sons shall wash their hands and feet thereat. They must always wash before entering the Tabernacle. The consequences of their failure to do so is death.

"Make holy anointing oil from myrrh, cinnamon, calamus, cassia, and olive oil. Sanctify the Tabernacle, the Ark, all its contents, and the priest with this oil. Make the holy incense with sweet spices, stacte, onycha, galbanum, and pure frankincense."

At the conclusion of His instructions, Yahweh presented Moses the two tablets of stone upon which the Ten Commandments were engraved; Moses returned to camp.

32: Meanwhile, with Moses gone, the Israelis, wishing to celebrate their escape, applied to Aaron. At his request, they gave to him golden earrings which he melted and sculptured into the form of a calf. The people declared a holiday, dancing, feasting, worshipping this god (the calf — which they credited with bringing them out of Egypt), drinking gustily, and engaging in debauchery and mischief.

From Mt. Sinai, Yahweh and Moses witnessed the orgy. Yahweh, in anger, threatened to destroy them all. Moses plead with Yahweh for their lives, reminding Him of His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Israel. Yahweh relented.

Moses came upon the camp, and the merriment ceased. Furiously, he hurled the tablets of stone against the mountain-side, breaking them. Amidst his rebukes to them, he melted the calf in the fire, ground the gold into powder, spread it upon the water, and made them drink of it. Then he stood at the gate to the camp and invited those who were on the side of God to join him. The Levites came.

Moses commanded this force of men: "Go into the camp armed with sword and kill idolators and evildoers, even brothers, friends, or neighbors." The Levites did not hesitate and about 3,000 men perished at their hands that day.

Yahweh sent a plague upon the people in punishment for their worship of Aaron's calf.

Yahweh's feelings were not soothed; He told the people, through Moses, that He would not travel with them anymore. From time to time, however, Moses, with Joshua, went to the Tabernacle (the people would watch from the doorway of their tents), and the pillar of Cloud would descend to the entrance; there Moses would meet and talk to God. Moses persistently requested the Lord for His aid and presence in their campaign to oust the Canaanites, Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites from the land flowing with milk and honey. And finally the Lord consented.

Moses asked to see God's glory. God placed Moses in the cleft of a rock. As Moses covered his face with his hands, the Lord passed by him and in that way Moses was unable to see the face of God but was able to see His back; otherwise, Moses would have died on seeing the glory of His face.

The tablets containing the Ten Commandments had been shattered when Moses threw them aside during the golden calf debacle. The Lord wrote the same commands upon new tablets Moses presented to Him. Yahweh bargained with Moses, who spoke for his people, that in exchange for their obedience to His laws, He would drive out from before them the peoples who occupied the land of Canaan.

When Moses returned from the mountaintop carrying the Ten Commandments, his face, still shining with the light of the presence of God, frightened his followers to the extent that they would not come near him. To allay those fears, Moses placed a veil over his face. He put the veil aside when speaking to the Lord, but when he would walk among the people he would replace the veil.

35: Moses told the people that they were to work only six days, that they could not so much as light the fires in their houses on the seventh day, that anyone working on that day would die. He delivered Yahweh's instructions about the materials and design

required for the construction of the Tabernacle, Ark, tables, and clothing. The Israelites carried out these directions.

When the work had been completed, the Cloud covered the Tabernacle, and the Tabernacle was filled by the glory of the Lord. Thereafter, whenever the Cloud lifted and moved, the Israelites moved also, following it, taking their Tabernacle, Ark, and other belongings with them; but if the Cloud was still, so also did they remain camped. At night the Cloud was aglow with fire, a constant assurance to those who followed.

LEVITICUS

Comment

Slow, dull reading material may become exciting when fitted into the whole picture. Your pleasure in the Book will be enhanced if you do not omit.

* * * * *

1: In His conversations with Moses in the Tabernacle, God gave these commands concerning sacrifices:

"In giving an ox as a burnt offering, bring a bull with no physical defects to the priests at the doorway of the Tabernacle. Lay your hands upon its head; as it dies, its death shall be an atonement for the sins of the man who brought it. When the man has killed the beast, the priest will sprinkle some of its blood on all sides of the altar, skin it, cut it up, and burn its intestines on the altar. It will be a sweet savor unto the Lord.

"The animal, whether an ox, sheep, or goat, must be a male without blemish.

"One may offer a turtledove or a young pigeon instead of an animal. In this case, the priest will wring off the head of the bird, pour out its blood, pull it apart, and place it upon the altar for burning.

"When grain offerings are made, a hand full of the grain is burned and the rest given to the priest. If bread is offered, it must be unleavened; the priests will burn a small part and keep the remainder for their enjoyment.

"Every offering must be seasoned with salt.

"As to peace offerings," said the Lord, "the bull or cow must be killed at the door of the Tabernacle by the donor. Aaron's sons shall sprinkle the blood upon the altar and burn some of the inward parts, which I shall relish. I am delighted by burnt offerings. All the fat is mine. Therefore, you shall not eat the fat or blood."

Yahweh said: "Those who, through ignorance or by accident, break My laws and commandments shall abide by these rules;

"If a priest do so, he shall offer a young bullock, without blemish, in the manner described, but he shall dip his finger in the blood and sprinkle it seven times before Me in the Holy Place in front of the veil behind which is the Holy of Holies. The priest shall put some of the blood on the horns of the incense altar, some of the blood on the altar for burnt offerings, and shall burn the fat, intestines, and gallbladder upon the altar itself.

"If the Israel nation unknowingly sin, the tribes shall bring a young bullock to Me for a sin offering; the priest shall spread its blood on the incense horns and splash it seven times in front of the veil, then burn its innards.

"If an elder or tribal officer sins unknowingly, he shall sacrifice a billy goat. If a common person sins, his contribution shall be a nanny goat or a female lamb without defect; the offerings shall be made to Me by fire. Their sins shall be forgiven."

5: The Lord further commanded: "One withholding testimony in a criminal case is guilty. One who touches a thing ceremonially unclean — for example, the carcass of a defiled animal or the dead body of an insect — is guilty.

"One who touches human waste is guilty.

"To atone for such guilt and free the guilty one from sin, one must bring a female lamb or goat to the priest.

"When one is unable to bring an animal, he shall offer two turtledoves or two pigeons.

"If he can't bring pigeons or doves, he shall bring fine flour.

"When one sins by defiling those things which are holy, he shall sacrifice a healthy ram. Anyone who breaks a law of God is, likewise, guilty and shall kill a blemishless ram as a trespass offering, and make such other gift of atonement as the priest may determine to be correct."

(God's laws include prohibitions for conversion of a neighbor's property to one's own use, robbery, lies, deceit, or theft of lost articles. The offender is required to make restitution plus a twenty per cent penalty and make his guilt offering at the Tabernacle in order to be forgiven of his offense.)

The Lord ruled, with regard to burnt offerings, "that the fire must never die, the ashes must be dumped in an undefiled place, and each morning the fire fed some fat." As to the meat offering, God decreed that "finely ground flour, oil, and meat flavored incense be mixed, a portion burned, and the remainder given to Aaron, his sons, and priests. Baked bread offerings are to be yeastless.

"Meat from animals for sin offerings may be eaten only by priests. If any blood touches their garments, they must wash the tainted cloth in vessels which must be broken after the washing. The same regulations apply to the trespass offering. Special peace offerings, bread, wafers, or animals, shall be eaten the day offered, but only by persons who are undefiled."

These are the regulations given to Moses by Yahweh on Mt. Sinai for the benefit of His chosen people in their worship of Him.

8: Then Moses, commanded by Yahweh, brought Aaron and his sons before the Tabernacle where the people had assembled. He dressed Aaron in the coat, girdle, robe, ephod, jacket, breast-plate with the Urim and Thummim, and the mitre with the holy golden plate. He dressed Aaron's sons in the same splendid fashion. He sprinkled the altar seven times with anointing oil, sprinkled the flagons, laver, pedestal and utensils, and then he poured oil on Aaron's head.

Moses then dedicated a bullock and two rams. Aaron and his sons lay their hands upon the heads of the animals as they were killed. Moses dabbled his finger in the blood of the dying ram of consecration, and daubed it upon the lobe of Aaron's right ear, the thumb of his right hand, and the big toe of his right foot. So also did he smudge each of Aaron's sons. Then he sprinkled blood upon the altar and there burned the ram's fat, rump, innards, caul, two kidneys and right shoulder, along with an unleavened oil soaked wafer.

Yahweh was delighted with the offerings. The consecration of these priests required seven days. Moses warned them, in accord with Yahweh's message to him, that if they left the Tabernacle area before the seven days had expired, they would die.

Aaron and his sons obeyed. Then Aaron presided at the ceremonies. The people brought to him a calf, a ram without bodily defect, a male goat for a sin offering, and a calf and lamb for burnt offerings, and a grain offering mixed with olive oil. Aaron and his sons killed the animals, poured the blood on the altar, and offered the grain, all in the manner Yahweh had prescribed. Aaron then blessed the people, and turned the ceremonies over to two of his sons, Nadab and Abihu.

Nadab and Abihu erred. They placed strange fire in their censers, and when they laid incense on the fire in their sacrifice to Yahweh, flames leaped out around them, consuming their clothing and searing their flesh, resulting in their deaths. Moses attempted to console Aaron, suggesting that the Lord had caused the young men to burn because they had not followed His instructions.

Yahweh ruled that thereafter neither Aaron nor the other priests were to enter the Tabernacle while under the influence of wine or strong drink.

Offerings of grain, the breast, and the thigh belonged to the priests as their part of the sacrifice.

11: The Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron: "The Israelis may eat animals which are cloven-footed and chew its cud, but they may not eat the camel, coney, hare, or the swine.

They may eat fish which have fins and scales, and all fowl, except the eagle, ossifrage, ospra, vulture, kite, raven, swan, nighthawk, owl, cormorant, pelican, stork, heron, lapwing, and the bat. They may not eat flying insects except those that leap on four legs such as locusts, beetles, and grass-hoppers, which may be eaten.

"Anyone even touching the dead bodies of animal, fish or insect forbidden as food shall be defiled; he shall wash his clothes and wait the evening. Creeping animals, such as the weasel, mouse, tortoise, ferret, lizard, mole, snail, or chameleon, are forbidden to you as food. If they are dead, they and any

article which they touch, such as an article of wood, clothing, skin, sack, or anything else, shall be unclean, and anyone touching these articles or the dead bodies of these animals, shall be defiled until evening. Earthen vessels touched by such animals shall be destroyed.

"I am Yahweh, your God. These are the laws by which I define what is ceremonially clean and that which is defiled."

One day Yahweh announced to Moses (and through Moses, the priests, and through the priests, the people):

"During a woman's menstruation period, she shall be defiled. When she gives birth to a baby boy, she shall be defiled for seven days. After she shall have circumcised her son (the eighth day), her guilt will continue for thirty-three more days, a time sufficient for purification of her uncleanness. During this time she is forbidden to touch anything sacred, or go into the Tabernacle.

"If the baby be a girl, at least eighty days will be required for her penitence and recovery from impurity. In either case, when the defilement period has ended, the young mother must offer a yearling lamb as a guilt offering and a young pigeon or dove as a sin offering to the priest at the Tabernacle entrance. When the priest has cut and burned the gifts to satisfy Me in atonement for her, she will again be clean."

Yahweh instructed Moses and Aaron how to make diagnosis of leprosy. He said that those afflicted should be required to live outside the camp, wear ragged and disheveled clothing, maintain themselves in an unkept condition, and announce in a loud voice as they walk along "I am unclean — I am unclean".

The Lord prescribed a purification ceremony for one cured of leprosy, using two live birds, cedar wood, scarlet thread and hyssop branches. "Pour water," He said, "into a crock dish and, while the water is running, kill one of the birds over the basin, allowing its blood to flow into the pot. Dip the wood, thread, hyssop branches, and the remaining live bird into the bloody bowl. Then sprinkle the liquid seven times upon the man being cured. Release the living bird.

"But before the healed one may associate with his neighbors in camp, he must shave his hair, wash his clothes, live outside his tent for seven days and then offer two male lambs and one yearling ewe lamb, without physical defects, together with flour and oil, to Me as a trespass and sin offering.

"The priest shall daub some of the blood from the offering upon the tip of the man's right ear, the thumb of his right hand, and the big toe of his right foot. He shall sprinkle some of the oil seven times before Me, and then pour the rest of it on his head. Thus, the man shall have made atonement with Me."

The Lord gave advice to Moses and Aaron concerning the inspection of housing, once they arrived in Canaan, for the

purpose of determining the existence of leprosy there. "If it appears that the house is defiled by leprosy," He admonished, "the house shall be dismantled and carried from the city to an unclean place; if it appears clean, the priest shall repeat the ritual with the two birds, wood, scarlet thread, and hyssop branches for making atonement for the house."

15: Yahweh submitted these laws, also:

"A man who has a kidney, genital, or fleshy discharge is defiled. His bed is defiled. One touching his bed is defiled. His chair is defiled, and one touching his seat or anything he sat upon is unclean until the even. One he spits on is defiled. Any earthen dish touched by the defiled man shall be broken.

"When the condition is cured, the man shall offer two turtledoves at the Tabernacle, one a sin offering and one a burnt offering. In this way, the priest shall make atonement for him.

"A man who discharges semen is defiled and he shall bathe. His clothing and flesh are unholy. A man and woman engaging in sexual intercourse are both defiled. A woman, during her period of bleeding, is defiled and for seven days afterwards. One who touches her, or anything she lays or sits on, is defiled. A man who has sexual intercourse with the woman during this period is defiled for seven days. If the bleeding period of the woman continue abnormally, she remains in the state of unholiness until seven days after the menstrual flow stops. She shall offer two pigeons, one as a sin offering and the other as a burnt offering to make atonement for her defilement."

The Lord said to Moses:

"The people shall bring two kid goats for a sin offering and a ram for their burnt offering. The rite of atonement shall be performed over one of the goats. It shall then be chased into the desert, taking the sins of Aaron and the people with it.

"Before Aaron can enter the Holy Place behind the veil, he must offer a young bull for a sin offering and a ram for a burnt offering. When Aaron has sacrificed the bull, he will bring incense inside the veil to the Mercy Place, sprinkle some of the blood of the animal on the eastward side of the Mercy Place and seven times in front of it. And the blood from the goat, too, he sprinkles upon the Place of Mercy."

(Aaron's ceremony is intended to make atonement for the Holy Place since it is in the midst of the sinful people of Israel and, therefore, defiled. After he finishes the Mercy Seat sprinkling, he puts his hand upon the goat, laying all the sins of the people upon its head, and sends it into the wilderness. The scapegoat thereby carries the sins of the people into the uninhabited wilderness.)

The Lord said: "You shall not work on the 25th day of September, a day of atonement on which the priest shall cleanse you from all your sins."

17: "Henceforth, any of you who sacrifice an animal of any kind anywhere other than at the Tabernacle shall lose your right as one of God's people; no longer shall the Israelites sacrifice in the hills and fields. Those who eat blood shall be exiled, and he who eats the dead body of an animal that dies naturally or is killed by another animal is unholy until the evening.

"You shall not have sexual intercourse with a near relative, a parent, your father's wives, a sister or half-sister, a granddaughter, nor aunt, daughter-in-law, or brother's wife.

"I forbid you to burn any of your children for Molech.

"Homosexuality and sex with an animal is prohibited. Keep these laws or you shall be rooted out of the country, as I expelled those nations before you. I am Jehovah, your God.

"Fear your parents, keep the Sabbath, avoid idolatry. I am your God.

"Eat peace offerings the same day you offer it; certainly by the third day any remaining must be burned. Eating it on the third day profanes the hallowed name of Yahweh; the penalty is exile from My people.

In the harvest, leave some of the fruit for others; share with the poor. You shall not steal, lie, defraud, swear falsely, oppress anyone, cheat your employees, curse the deaf, hinder a blind man, carry rumors, falsely accuse others, hate, or rebuke your brother, or seek vengeance.

"Do not eat the first four crops upon new land you have subjected, the fifth crop belongs to you.

"Do not use enchantments, or seers, and do not shave your head or cut your beard at the corners, neither cut nor print marks upon your body. Keep My Sabbath laws, revere My sanctuary, respect the elderly, treat strangers fairly, and be just in judgment.

20: "One who gives his child to be burned before Molech shall be stoned. The penalty for adultery for a man and another man's wife is death to both. Both parties to homosexual acts shall be killed. If a man lie with a woman and her mother, he and they shall be burned. Sexual relations with an animal is punishable by death to the person and the animal. Excommunication is the penalty for sexual intercourse with a sister or intercourse with a woman during her period of menstruation.

"You shall stone to death a medium or wizard."

Jehovah gave these guidelines for priests:

"The priest shall never touch a dead person. He shall not cut his flesh, shave his hair or beard, marry a whore, a woman profaned, or a divorced woman. The High Priest shall not uncover his head, nor tear his clothing. He must marry a virgin from his own tribe. If he has any physical defect, he may not approach the altar nor offer burnt or grain offerings thereon, nor shall he go into the Most Holy Place behind the veil. He may eat

of the priests' share of the offerings.

"A defiled priest who makes sacrifices shall be cut off from My presence. A priest who has touched a dead person or has had a constant genital discharge, or touched a creeping or forbidden thing, or is otherwise unholy, may not eat the sacrificial meat until that night after he has bathed.

"Only the priest, his slaves and their children may eat of the holy sacrifices. If one unknowingly consumes that which was intended for the priests, he shall return the same amount plus one-fifth extra.

"Sacrificed animals must be without blemish.

"Proclaim these seasonal festivals: The Lord's Passover, Feast of Unleavened Bread, First Fruits Feast, Holiday fifty days following First Fruits, Trumpets Festival, Day of Atonement Dedication, Feast of Tabernacles, and each Sabbath.

24: "The priests shall continually maintain the flame in the golden lamps on the outside of the veil. Each day, twelve large cakes shall be baked, dedicated with incense as a memorial offering, and given to Aaron and his sons as a part of their food ration."

One day during a fight between an Israelite and a half-breed (Israelite-Egyptian), the half-breed cursed, blaspheming the name of Yahweh. The youth was brought before Moses. Moses sought the Lord's counsel. Yahweh judged, "Let the congregation stone him." And they did.

"He who kills a man shall also be put to death," said the Lord. "He who injures his neighbor shall receive like injury, eye for eye or tooth for tooth, whether it be foreigner or Israeli."

"Every seventh year," decreed Yahweh, "the land shall lay unattended. On the fiftieth year, the trumpets shall announce the Year of Jubilee; liberty shall be proclaimed; all public and private debts shall be forgiven. In that year, you shall not sow or gather crops. He who had sold his home may reclaim it without any cost. The Israelite servants shall be released to their own family. Foreign slaves need not be released if owned by an Israelite, but, on the other hand, if a foreigner living among you own a Hebrew slave, he must release the slave at that time.

"Set aside your idols, keep My Sabbath, and revere My Temple. If you follow My rules, I will give you rains, abundant crops and fruit, and victory over your enemies. I will live in your midst as your God, and you shall be My people. I am Jehovah, who brought you out of Egypt, freed you from bondage, and restored your honor.

"But if you fail to obey Me, I will send you feverish plagues and bare crops, and your enemies strength to rule you. If you will not listen then, I will increase the punishment seven times. If you continue then to disobey, I will send seven times more plagues,

and wild animals to kill your children and destroy your cattle. If you then refuse to reform, I will smite you seven times, incite an enemy invasion, and send more plagues to harass you. If you still won't heed, I will chastise you seven times more; you will eat your own sons and daughters. I will destroy your idol altars, desolate your cities and your land and allow your enemies to occupy it, and those who survive will be captured and carried away to prisons in distant lands.

"Then, when My people of Israel have confessed their sins, I will remember My promises to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and I will not utterly destroy them."

Regarding special vows concerning a person who promises service to God, "I," said Yahweh, "will allow instead these payments: adult male \$25.00; female \$15.00; juvenile, above five years, boy \$10.00, girls \$5.00; boy baby to age five \$2.50, girl \$1.50; man over sixty \$7.50, woman \$5.00. Some animals may be redeemed by allowing the Priest to set a value in its stead.

"Land and houses dedicated to God may be redeemed by having the Priest make an estimate of their worth.

"One may not pledge first-born oxen or sheep as they already belong to Yahweh. A tenth of the harvest and a tenth of the herds and flocks belong to the Lord."

These are the commandments of Jehovah through Moses to His chosen people, the children of Israel.

NUMBERS

1: In April of the second year following their departure from Egypt, Moses and Aaron, at Jehovah's command, rendered a census of all militarily eligible men who were more than twenty years old. They found that the numbers of each tribe ranged from 32,200 (Mannasseh) to 74,600 (Judah), and altogether there were 603,550 able-bodied men. This did not include the Levites whom Yahweh had appointed as priests to assist Aaron and his sons. (Yahweh had decreed that anyone else who presumed to assume the office of priest would be executed.)

The census of the tribe of Levi, taken in the Sinai desert, disclosed that it contained 22,000 males. The number of elder sons of the tribes of Israel was 22,273. The Lord informed Moses, a Levite, that He, the Lord, had chosen the Levites instead of the eldest sons of the nation. The 273 sons in excess of the 22,000 Levites taken by the Lord were redeemed by a gift of money from the people to Aaron.

The various duties for the care of the Tabernacle, linens, curtains, roofing sheets, boards, lampstand, altars, utensils, the veil, posts, bases, ropes and other sacred equipment were divided among the families of the Levite tribe.

The Kohaths were given the responsibility of carrying the Ark; the altar, the utensils, the tent, and other units were transported by other clans. Yahweh informed the members of this tribe, through Moses, that none of them should touch any of the holy items, under penalty of death; care was taken to see that the holy items were sufficiently wrapped to prevent their contact with any part of the sons of Kohath. The Gershonites and the Merari tribes assisted the Kohathites in carrying the Tabernacle articles to the new camp. The number of persons (males between thirty and fifty years old) who were named for transportation of Tabernacle units was 8,580.

And Yahweh made more rules:

"One guilty of trespass against his brother must kill his lamb before the priest for atonement, and repay the injured party in full, plus twenty per cent.

"When a wife is suspected of having committed adultery, the husband will bring her, and cakes for a jealousy offering, to the priest. The priest shall mix Holy Water with dust from the Tabernacle floor, set her before him, uncover her head and offer her the mixture. She shall swear to her innocence while holding the liquid, then drink it. If the woman has committed adultery, the water will taste bitter to her, her stomach will swell, and her thigh will rot. If she is pure, she will become pregnant.

"One taking a special vow as a Nazarite shall not partake of strong drink or wine during the period of his vow. He may not go

near any dead body; if he is accidentally defiled by some such death occurring in his proximity, he shall shave his head and offer two turtledoves to the priest as a sin and burnt offering, thereby making atonement. After the consecration ceremonies and the proper sacrifices have been made, the Nazarite may again drink wine."

Only the Kohath tribe carried the Ark, and on foot. The leaders of the tribes presented wagons and oxen to the Levites to assist them in moving the Tabernacle and its accessories from place to place. In dedicating the altar in the Tabernacle, the tribes and the members thereof brought many gifts, including silver bases, bowls, golden spoons, bulls, rams, goats and lambs.

Yahweh, having accepted the Levites in place of the eldest sons of Israel, set them apart from the other people. They received priestly sprinkling of holy water on them in dedication ceremonies. They shaved their entire bodies and made particular sacrifices of animals and grain.

"The Levites will offer the peoples' sacrifices and perform the sacred rites required of Israel," said Jehovah. "They may serve from the ages of twenty-five to fifty, after which age they will be limited to light congregational duties."

9: As to the Passover, Jehovah consented that any of those who were ceremonially defiled by having touched a dead person at Passover time could celebrate the holiday one month later, but provided that those who were not defiled and who refused to celebrate the Passover should be ostracized by the people.

When the Cloud moved, the camp, including the Tabernacle, was dismantled and carried by the people of Israel to the Cloud's next stop, where they re-established. The Hebrews made trumpets for announcing assemblies, moving the camp, enemy alert and festivals. Only the priests were allowed to sound the horns. With each move, the tribes arranged themselves in the same order within the caravan and, following the Cloud, from Sinai headed northward into the Paran Wilderness.

Moses invited his brother-in-law to go with them because of his knowledge of the Wilderness.

Soon the people were again complaining. Yahweh was irked; He sent fire upon those at one end of the procession, and many died as the fire raged. From the inferno's edges came pleas to Moses for help; he prayed and the flames died.

At a meeting of the elders, Moses appealed to the Lord for help in handling the people's complaints for meat. The Spirit of the Lord rested upon them. He sent them quail from the sea. There was more than enough for everyone and many ate too much.

The Israelites' over-indulgence in the delivered food aroused Yahweh's ire. He smote them with plague, and many died. When He overheard Miriam (sister of Aaron) and Aaron criticizing

Moses, He made a leper of Miriam. Moses plead for her and Yahweh restored her, but she endured the confinement outside camp for seven days nonetheless. (At that time, they were encamped at Hazeroth, just north of the Gulf of Aqabah.)

As they were traveling, Moses sent twelve spies through Hebron northward into Canaan. The spies soon returned, bearing a huge cluster of grapes draped on a staff between two of their strongest men. They showed samples of other bountiful fruit. They reported that the cities were large, walled, and well defended, that the Amalekites were in the south, the Hittites, Jebusites, and the Amorites occupied the hills, and the Canaanites were entrenched on the banks of the Jordan and along the Mediterranean coast.

The people were afraid to attempt the conquest of their Promised Land. They began weeping. Moses and Aaron plead with them to obey the Lord's commands without fear. Their pleas did not appease, but only angered the people, who muttered that they should stone both Moses and Aaron.

The Lord disgustedly threatened to obliterate the entire nation. On Moses supplication, He pardoned them once more. Yahweh directed that they should retreat into the wilderness toward the Red Sea. He told the people: "Not one of you will be allowed to enter the Promised Land (except Caleb and Joshua). You shall wander in the desert for forty years. It will be your children who will finally see the land of milk and honey. You will die in the wilderness."

Then He killed ten of the twelve spies who had returned to camp with the discouraging report.

By the next day the people had changed their minds. They decided to invade Canaan. They marched toward Canaan in spite of Moses' warning that Yahweh was not with them. They were met and soundly thrashed by Amalekite and Canaanite defenders, who chased them back into the wilderness.

15: The Lord told Moses: "In the Promised Land, sacrifices are to be made by sacrificing fine flour with the meat offering and three pints of wine for a drink offering; or, if sacrificing a bull, the drink offering shall be three quarts of wine.

"If there is any error made during priestly ceremonies which is brought to the attention of the Priest, a young bull must be burned to rectify the matter. The offering will be a pleasant odour before Me. The sacrifices should be made with an offer of grain and wine, along with one kid goat for a sin offering. If the mistake is not accidental, but deliberate, the individual has despised God and must be utterly cut off from My people."

Once, one of the Israel people was discovered gathering firewood on the Sabbath. He was taken to Moses, who, in turn, sought God's help.

"Kill him," said Yahweh, "stone him."

The congregation drug the man outside camp and stoned him to death.

Korah (son of Kohath), Dathan and Abiram, acting jointly, rebelled against Moses. They assembled 250 of the leaders and confronted him, questioning the authority which he had taken upon himself. Moses accused Korah of being after the priesthood. They agreed to meet at the Tabernacle the next day.

The congregation was barely assembled outside the Tabernacle the following morning when the Glory of Yahweh appeared, disposed, He said, "to destroy them all". Moses realized the danger. He warned the people to stand back from the tents of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram.

"I am a man of God," he cried, "the earth will open and swallow Korah, Dathan and Abiram."

The echo of his cries had not died when the ground opened and swallowed not only the three men, but also their wives, children, tents, and their followers standing near them. At the same time, Yahweh sent a consuming fire upon the 250 men who had been assembled by Korah, Dathan and Abiram.

The next day, the people grumbled that Moses and Aaron were killing the Lord's people. As the angry citizens approached Aaron and Moses on the Tabernacle grounds, the Cloud came to where Moses and Aaron stood at the opening of the Tabernacle tent. Yahweh renewed His threat to destroy the people. Aaron quickly carried a censer containing fire and incense from the altar among the people and made atonement for them, for God, angry, had begun a plague among them. In this way, the plague was stayed, but more than 14,000 people died.

Moses, upon Yahweh's prompting, asked the leaders of the tribes of Israel to bring their wooden rod for placement in the Tabernacle, each rod to be identified with the name of the tribe. Moses informed the leaders of these tribes that Yahweh would cause plant buds to grow from the rod of the man He had chosen to be their true leader. The tribesmen agreed and the rods were set in the Tabernacle.

The next day, Aaron's rod, representing the tribe of Levi, had budded, blossomed, and bore almonds. The people were amazed. Aaron's rod was installed before the Ark to serve as a reminder of the unsuccessful rebellion.

The Israelis still complained. "Anyone who comes near the Tabernacle dies. Are we all going to be killed?" they asked.

18: Yahweh appointed Aaron, his sons and family, in charge of the Tabernacle, and the tribe of Levi, kinsmen of Aaron, to assist him in making the sacrifices. He decreed that anyone other than Aaron and his sons who undertook the priestly services would die.

The Lord ordered that the meat, grain, and other gifts which the people brought to Him be given to the Levites. "The Levites will own no property," Yahweh commanded, "but will be compensated with the tithes from all the other Israelites."

"The Levites, in turn," explained Yahweh, "will pay the best tenth of their tithes to the presiding high priests."

For the making of Holy Water, Yahweh prescribed this procedure: "Eleazar (son of Aaron) shall sprinkle the blood of a red heifer, freshly slain, seven times at the Temple entrance. Burn the heifer. As the cow is consumed, Eleazar shall toss in cedar wood, hyssop branches, and scarlet. When the fire has died, Eleazar shall wash his clothes and remove the ashes of the heifer to someplace outside camp. There, he may run water through the ashes. This Holy Water shall be used for purification of sinners.

"Then, when one becomes unclean (such as one who touches a dead human body), he must purify himself the third day of his seven day defilement with water which has been run through the ashes of the red heifer. One who does not purify himself in this way shall be cut off from Israel.

"If one dies in a tent, hyssop branches shall be dipped into the Holy Water and then sprinkled upon the tent. Those who entered the tent, the utensils of the tent, and even the pots and pans of anyone who has been defiled by being in the tent or near the dead person, must be sprinkled with the Holy Water. Those who are unclean and do not comply with this command shall be excommunicated."

The Israelites, lead by Moses and Aaron, arrived at Kadesh, Wilderness of Zin, in April. There was no water. They complained bitterly to Moses and Aaron.

Moses and Aaron asked Jehovah for help. He instructed them to assemble the people and, after they were met together, to speak to a rock for water, and it would come.

Moses and Aaron gathered the people before the rock; Moses lifted the rod, but instead of speaking to the rock, struck it twice. Water flowed from where none had been.

Yahweh was miffed; "You did not sanctify Me since you did not speak to the rock; I, therefore, decree that you shall not have the honor of bringing the Israelite people into the Promised Land."

From Kadesh, where the people had lived most of their thirty-eight nomad years, Moses requested permission of the King of Edom for passage of his people through his land. The King refused and mustered strong defenses at the boundary. The Israel people turned eastward to Mt. Hor.

There Aaron died. Eleazar, succeeding to his office, received his garments, the symbols of his authority.

21: Despite attacks from the King of Arad and his peoples (Israel finally destroyed them), the Israelites continued their

journey, turning southward toward the Red Sea in order to avoid Edom. The people complained about the lack of food and drink and the boredom of eating manna. Yahweh sent serpents among them to attack them, and many died.

God told Moses to make a fiery serpent (an image of brass) and place it on top of a pole. "Advise the Israelites," said Yahweh, "that they will be cured of snake bites if they will gaze upon the image." Sure enough, when any of the Israelites thereafter were bitten by a snake, they looked at the brass idol held aloft in their midst and were cured.

The Israelites, now moving northward, journeyed to Oboth, then on past Iyeabarim, just east of Moab, near the Dead Sea, finally camping on the banks of the Arnon River dividing Moab from Ammon. They sent word to King Sihon of the Amorites that they wished to travel through his territory. King Sihon gathered his army instead and unwisely attacked the Hebrews. He and his forces were defeated.

In winning this battle, Israel was able to occupy all the land and cities of the Amorites, including Heshbon. Stronger and more confident, the Israelites invaded the City of Bashan, killed its inhabitants, and possessed that land, also. On the plains of Moab, across the Jordan from Jericho, they made their camp.

King Balak of Moab, horrified at the size and strength of the invaders, sent emissaries to Pethor, by the great river, to ask the renowned Balaam (a priest of Baal) for help. He asked Balaam to bless his people and curse the invading Hebrews. He hoped in this way to be the victor in the anticipated conflict. Balaam at first refused, but after discussing the matter with his god, he started out on his donkey with his god's instructions that he was to say only the words his god told him to say.

God was angry because he went, so He sent an angel with drawn sword to lie in wait for him, and kill him as he passed by.

The donkey could see the angel, although Balaam could not, and when Balaam's donkey saw the image, he ran off into a field. Balaam beat the donkey and returned it to the way. The angel stationed itself down the path, blocking the passageway. The donkey then squeezed quickly past the angel, but in doing so, he mashed Balaam's foot against a wall. Then, when the angel moved further down the road and stood where the donkey could not pass, the donkey balked altogether and lay down. After each reaction by the donkey, Balaam beat her with his stick.

Finally, the donkey asked, "Why do you beat me? What wrong have I done? Have I ever done anything like this before?" Balaam realized that the donkey had not balked before. He looked about the premises and discovered the angel standing in the roadway with a drawn sword. Balaam told the angel he would go back home if the angel so instructed. The angel said, "No, go on, but say

only that which I tell you to speak."

Balaam told the king that he could say only what God told him to say. Accompanied by the king, he ascended to the peak of a mountain overlooking the encamped hordes of Israeli desert tribesmen and sacrificed seven bulls and seven rams on seven altars. The first message which Balaam gave to the king there at the mountain was a blessing of the Israelites rather than a curse. Disturbed, King Balak took Balaam to another mountain, built seven more altars upon which Balaam sacrificed seven more bulls and seven more rams.

The king asked Balaam, "What says Jehovah now?" Balaam looked down at the huge Israeli army, then back to the king, and replied, "God has blessed the Israelites; it cannot be reversed." The king, distraught to the point of panic, took Balaam to yet a third mountain. Balaam's answer was the same. He prophesied that a curse was promised anyone who dared to curse Israel, that the Israelites would surely smite the land of Moab, the Amalekites, and even Eber and Assyria.

Balaam advised the Moabites to invite the Israelites to their parties in order that together they could feast, revel, and worship Baal, the god of Moab.

And it came about that some of the young Israelite men began dating the Moabite girls, attending lewd meetings, participating in sex orgies and worshipping the idols of Baal.

Yahweh stirred angrily. He ordered Moses to publicly hang the tribal leaders. Moses promptly issued directives to the judges to slay those among them who had worshipped the Baal idol. Still Zimri, of the Simeon tribe, brought Cozbi, daughter of one of the Midianite princes, into his tent. This made Priest Phinehas so mad he rushed into Zimri's tent and thrust his spear through Zimri with such force that the woman's stomach was also pierced. The Lord's anger was appeased, and the plague stopped, but 24,000 people had died.

Yahweh urged Moses, "The Midianites are seducing you to sin; destroy them all."

26: Now Moses and Eleazar took another census which showed the number of men available for military use was 601,730, not including the Levites. Yahweh directed that the land of Canaan, when conquered, was to be apportioned among the tribes in proportion to the number in each tribe. He decreed that when a man dies without sons, his inheritance shall be passed on to his daughters, and if he has no daughters, to his brothers, and if he has no brother, to his uncles, and if no uncles, then to the nearest of kin.

The parents of Aaron, Moses and Miriam were Jochebed (daughter of Levi) and Amram, son of Kohath (ancestor of the Kohathites).

The time had come for Moses to die. At the Lord's command, Moses set out to commission Joshua to take up his responsibilities. Joshua was to communicate with Yahweh through Eleazar, the Priest, who could speak to Yahweh through the use of the Urim. Moses then ceremonially charged Joshua as his successor.

"Moses," Yahweh reminded, "burnt offerings are very pleasurable to me; bring them often, as they are due, and offer them in the manner I have described to you. I want two lambs each day, one in the morning, and one in the evening, with three quarts of flour blended in three pints of oil. Three pints of strong wine (a drink offering) shall accompany this gift.

"On the Sabbath, sacrifice two additional yearling male lambs with the flour and the drink offering. Additionally, in the early part of each month, present and butcher two bulls, one ram, and seven male yearling lambs, together with flour, oil, and six pints of strong wine. At that time, one male goat shall be sacrificed also.

"On April 14th you shall celebrate the Passover, offering burnt sacrifices, rams, lambs, oil and flour as I described to you. On the other holidays — First Fruits Day, Trumpets Feast, Atonement Day, etc. — you are to offer the sacrifices I have named together with flour, bread, and wine."

31: Yahweh said to Moses: "Take vengeance on the Midianites!"

Moses sent 12,000 armed men throughout Midian, led by Phinehas carrying Temple treasures, and blasting trumpets. Each and every man of Midian was slaughtered. The Israeli forces captured all the women and children, rounded up the cattle and sheep, and looted and burned the cities. The loot, sheep, cattle, women and children were brought to Moses and Eleazar.

Moses fumed at the commanders of the expedition. "Why have you not killed all these women who induced our people to worship idols?", he barked. "Kill every infant male and boy, and each and every woman who has lain with man. Now! You may keep the virgin girls for yourselves. Then stay out of camp seven days, purify yourselves, your garments, and your loot and captives on the third and seventh days with fire or Holy Water."

Yahweh advised Moses: "Divide the spoils into two parts. From both parts take a share of the captives, oxen, donkeys and sheep for the priests, plus two per cent for the Levites; divide the remainder, one-half to the men who were in the battle and the other half to the people of Israel."

The booty included 675,000 sheep, 72,000 beeves, 61,000 asses, and 32,000 virgin girls. The army officers brought Moses a special thanksgiving offering of some of the loot (jewelry) for their successful mission; this was taken into the Tabernacle.

The tribes of Reuben and Gad requested that they be awarded

the conquered land. Being cattlemen, they noted that the land was suited for the raising of cattle. Moses agreed that if they furnished men for the invasion of Canaan, the rest of the two tribes could remain to occupy the land which they had conquered, and build their cities. The tribes of Reuben and Gad built the cities of Dibon, Beth-haran, Jazer, Heshbon, Nebo, Shibmah and many others, including Gilead.

33: This is a summary of the travels of Moses, Aaron and the people of Israel led by the Cloud of God. From Rameses, Egypt, on April 1st to Succoth, thence through the divided waters of the Red Sea and a three days march into the wilderness, stopping at Marah;

And, thence to Elim, where they tarried for a while, then through the wilderness of Sihm, stopping at times by the Red Sea, to Dophkah, Alush, and then Rephidim;

From Rephidim, they entered the wilderness of Sinai, thence to Kibroth-hattaavah, to Hazeroth, Rithmah, Rimmon-parez, Libnah, Rissah, Kehelathah, Mount Shapher, Haradah, Makheloth, Tahath, Tarah, Mithcah, Hashmonah, Moseroth, Bene-jaakan, Horhagidgad, Jotbathah, Ebronah, Ezion-gaber, Kadesh, Mount Hor, Zalmonah, Punon, Oboth, Ijeabarim, Dibon-gad, Almondiblathaim, the Abarim Mountains, and then to the plains of Moab beside the river Jordan, behind Jericho.

While they were camped along the Jordan River, Yahweh approached Moses and said: "You must drive out all the people of Canaan, destroy their idols, and occupy their land; none of them, not even one, may remain lest they tempt you in their idol worship. The boundaries of your land will be the Mediterranean Sea on the West to Hazer-enan, Riblah, Jordan River, Dead Sea, and Lebo-Hamath on the East, from Kadesh-barnea, Azmon on the South to Mount Hor — Hazer-enan on the North. Eleazar, Joshua, and one leader from each tribe will divide up the land.

"The Levites are to receive forty-eight specific cities with suburbs for pasture; these pasturelands shall measure from the Levite city walls 3,000 feet in each direction. Six of these cities will be places of refuge for persons who may be wrongfully accused of a crime."

Moses instructed the people that women who were heiresses (girls who were born into families who had no male heir) must marry within their own tribe in order that the land would never be transferred from one tribe to another with consequent changes in tribal territorial boundaries.

DEUTERONOMY

1: This book reflects a speech by Moses to his people as they paused in the valley near Paran. The date was February 15th, forty years from the time they left Mount Horeb. (Kadesh-barnea, from Mt. Horeb, is an ordinary journey of eleven days.) The Amorites had just been defeated at Heshbon and Bashan had been taken from King Og. Moses speaks:

"Forty years ago, our God told us to invade and possess the Amorite hill country, the Arabah valley, the Negeb, the land of Canaan and Lebanon, all the territory from the Mediterranean to the Euphrates. He gave us these lands to conquer with instructions to drive out its peoples. In this way, His promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob would be fulfilled.

"At that time, I appointed assistants to help me in the administration of the laws and taught them to be fair and impartial. After leaving Mount Sinai, we traveled through the desert to the Amorite mountains of Kadesh-barnea. While we were camped there, we sent scouts into the land of Canaan for information to assist us in invading the lands and attacking the people there. Their report did indeed verify that the land was one of milk and honey, but when we also learned the peoples were well defended, you were afraid to attack them.

"Yahweh was very angry with your fears, and your whining. He decreed that even I should not ever enter the Promised Land, and He ordered us to return across the desert toward the Red Sea.

"But then you decided to fight and, without the assistance of Yahweh, you launched an attack upon the Amorites, and you lost. Forced into retreat to Kadesh, we dallied, confused and without purpose, finally retreating toward the Red Sea in the vicinity of Mount Seir. Then Yahweh turned us northward. We passed through Edom, the Elath plain, the land of giants, Moab (the Lord told us not to attack them as this was the land of Lot), across Zered Brook, which lies southeast of the Dead Sea, and then to Arnon River into the Amorite Kingdom, where we made war against King Sihon of that land.

"But first, we sent messengers to King Sihon, asking for peace and free passage. King Sihon, of course, refused. The war began, and we overwhelmed King Sihon and his forces at Jahaz and destroyed everything; we massacred every man, woman and child, even the newborn. We saved only the cattle, which we took with the other spoils of our conquest.

"We were careful not to contend with the armies in Ammon, the Jabbok River and the north hill country, but we defeated all the other cities southward.

"We smashed the troops of King Og and took all sixty of his cities, including Bashan. We butchered the entire population, men, women and children alike. We kept the cattle and the spoils.

"I gave the conquered territory to the tribes of Reuben and Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh. It was agreed that upon our invasion of the land of Canaan, those tribes would furnish men and weapons for that conquest. I asked God to allow me to enter the beautiful Promised Land, but the Lord was still angry with me because of you and refused me permission. He ordered that I charge Joshua with responsibilities of leadership."

Moses continued, "Live up to your contract with Yahweh. Heed the laws and do not add or subtract from them. These are God's commandments to be learned and obeyed, here, and in the new land. Teach your children these laws; tell them of the wondrous works which you have seen in our journeys. Do not defile yourselves by making a statue (an idol) or worship the sun, moon or stars. Jehovah will dwell among you, His people.

"There will come a time when your children will disobey. Yahweh will scatter them among the nations and in these places they will worship idols and be defiled. But they will finally return to the Lord.

"You must set apart three cities east of the Jordan (Bezer, Ramoth, and Golan) as places of refuge of those wrongfully accused of homicidal crimes.

"When you enter the wondrous land, made available to you by God's promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, observe the great cities and their contents. Cities built by others — wells dug by someone else — fruits, vineyards and olive trees which someone else planted and tended — full storehouses to which you did not contribute — and more — then remember that it was Yahweh who drove out the peoples who toiled to create these things and gave them to you. Therefore, do not worship the gods of other nations.

7: "In your invasion of the Promised Land, through Yahweh's assistance, you will destroy the following nations: Hittites, Girgashites, Amorites, Canaanites, Perizzites, Hivites, and Jebusites. Utterly annihilate them, without mercy. Break up the altars, images, and idols and burn them.

"Do not intermarry with the natives for you are a holy people, having been Yahweh's choice from all the people in the earth. Because of His love for you, He will bless you and make you multiply and prosper. The fertility He bestows will extend even to your animals, and you will have abundant crops of grain and fruit. None of you shall be barren, nor shall your cattle. You will have no illnesses as He will see to it that these illnesses are borne by the neighboring peoples.

"Do not fear these nations you are about to enter. Yahweh will oust these peoples little by little. See how the Lord has cared for you; you have not gone hungry (there was the manna) and your clothes, even in forty years, have not grown old, and your feet

have not swollen. When you are enjoying the land that will soon be yours through your God — the land of cool springs, refreshing streams, wheat, barley, vines, fig trees, olives, honey, iron, and brass — think about what Yahweh has done for you; obey Him, revere Him. Remember, your success is not of your making. The Lord is not doing all this for you because of your righteousness, but only because of His promises to your ancestors, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and the wickedness of the other peoples.

“Do you remember when our angry God threatened to destroy you on Mount Horeb for your worship and revelry before the molten calf? I plead with Him, and He spared you. And when you rebelled at Taberah and at Massah, I intervened for you to still His wrath. Each time our Lord relented. You must love and obey your God.

“Although you young people didn’t see the miracles that Yahweh performed in Egypt, your experience of recent events should have been enough to convince you. The Lord will bless you in the new land. You have the choice of receiving God’s blessing if you obey these commandments which I now recite, but God’s curse if you refuse them.

“In the new land, you must destroy heathen evidences of their god (altars and idols), and make sacrifices to the Hebrew God at, and only at, the sanctuary that you must build. Include the Levite in your feasts as he has no inheritance of his own.

“The offerings may not be eaten at home. The wine, oil, first-born of the flocks and herds, and all other offerings must be brought to the Temple where you, your children, servants and the Levites shall eat them before the Lord (wild game may be eaten anywhere). Don’t worship the gods of other nations that you occupy. Some of their customs (such as burning their own sons and daughters) are heinous.

13: “False prophets must be killed, even if the false prophet seeking to arouse your interest in another god be a son, brother, daughter, or wife. He or she shall be stoned. If, during the occupation, one of the cities shall worship a god other than Jehovah, then the remaining Israelites shall attack that city, slay its inhabitants, and burn its edifices as an offering to Jehovah.

“Never cut yourself or shave the front part of your head. Don’t eat animals that are abominable in Jehovah’s sight, nor boil a goat in its mother’s milk. Tithe your harvest. Take care of the Levites. Every third year, your tithe is to be given to widows, orphans, Levites, and other worthy persons.

“Every seventh year, release your Hebrew debtors, give away your Hebrew slaves, observe the Passover, and make the required sacrifices at the Temple. Celebrate the Festival of Tabernacles, the Feast of Unleavened Bread, and Feast of Weeks. Give to Yahweh on these occasions.

"Appoint judges to rule your cities impartially.

"Give healthy animals for sacrifices. Yahweh is appalled at your gift of a blemished animal.

"If anyone worship another god, then that man or woman shall be stoned to death. There must be at least two witnesses to this crime and these witnesses shall be required to throw the first stones.

"If you choose a king, you must choose an Israelite who shall study the law, remain humble, and rule impartially.

"Give to the Levites. From the offerings, they shall receive the choicest meat. Israelites shall not offer their children to the heathen gods as a sacrifice, nor shall they practice divination, witchcraft, fortune telling, snake charming, consulter of spirits, or wizardry. It is the nations you replace that do all these evil things. If a person unintentionally kills someone, he may go to one of the three cities of refuge and be safe; but if the elders of his hometown shall send for him, then he shall be delivered up to them for their determination of his intent. If the killing was deliberate, he shall be slain.

"Do not hold a man for a crime on the testimony of one witness. Three witnesses are preferred, but two, under certain circumstances, are sufficient. Show no pity to a false witness; take eye for eye and tooth for tooth.

21: "Do not fear the armed might of your enemies; with Yahweh on your side, you will conquer them.

"A man serving in the services shall be excused from battle in those cases where he has built, but not dedicated, his house; he has planted a vineyard, but harvested no fruit; he is married, but has not yet slept with his bride; or he is afraid.

"In attacking any of the cities (outside the Promised Land), you may offer a peace settlement whereby the inhabitants shall become your slaves. If they refuse, then devastate the city. Slay every man. But you may keep the women, children, cattle and spoils.

"But this is not the rule for those in the cities living in the lands the Lord delivers to you as an inheritance. It is Yahweh's command that you destroy the Hittites, the Amorites, the Canaanites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. You are to save no one, not a man, nor a woman, nor a boy, nor a girl, nor a child. Kill anything that breathes.

"Don't destroy the fruit trees in the city. If your looting of the cities includes the capture of a beautiful girl that you wish to marry, you may marry her, but if you do, you may not treat her as a slave thereafter.

"The first-born son shall retain his rights of heirship even though a father may have other sons by other wives whom he favors. A father or mother may bring a rebellious son before the

elders, who shall order him stoned to death. When a man is executed and hanged on a tree, his body shall not remain on the tree overnight; he must be buried (a hanged man is accursed of God).

“Help others.

“A woman shall not wear men’s garments; a man shall not wear woman’s apparel. The Lord declares that this is an abomination. Every new house must be built with a protective wall to prevent falls off the flat rooftop. Don’t wear clothes made from a combination of threads such as wool and linen. Sew fringe decorations on the four corners of your vestments.

“If a man falsely accuses his wife of not being a virgin of Israel, and she, through her parents, prove otherwise, he may not divorce her; if his charges prove true, she will be stoned to death at the door of her father’s home. An engaged female who is seduced inside the city shall, with her lover, be stoned; if outside the city, only her lover shall so suffer.

23: “A man shall not enter the Tabernacle if his testicles have been injured or his penis shall have been severed. Neither a bastard, nor his descendants for ten generations, shall enter the sanctuary.

“Ammonites or Moabites will never be permitted to worship in the Temple. Descendants of the Egyptians who came with you from Egypt may do so.

“Soldiers camped during periods of war must be kept holy. The men must carry a shovel with their weapon. When one shall have a bowel movement in the area designated for such purpose outside the camp, he must first dig a hole, and after defecation, cover what he has done. One having an accidental sexual discharge during the night shall be unholy, and shall stay outside camp until evening.

“Prostitution is forbidden. You may charge a foreigner interest, but not an Israeli brother. Keep your vows. Do not remarry your divorced wife that has remarried and become widowed since you sent her away. A bridegroom is exempt from military service for one year. Do not take advantage of your employees.

“Fathers shall not suffer for the errors of their sons, neither shall the sons be punished for the sins of their fathers.

“Criminal penalties involving beating shall not exceed forty blows. A woman shall be married by her brother-in-law if her husband dies leaving no son, and if her husband’s brother refuses, she may have him brought before the elders of the city; and if he still refuses, she shall, in the presence of the elders, pull his shoe from his foot and spit in his face.

“If a wife assists her husband who is fighting another man by seizing the testicles of the other man, then she shall be punished by having her hand cut off. You shall show no pity for her.

“Use perfect and just weights and measures.

“Destroy the Amaleks.

“When you cross the Jordan River, take large stones from the river, pile them high, cement them together, and write upon them the laws of the Lord. Make offerings to Him upon this altar. Six tribes standing on Mount Ebal shall instill a curse as follows: The Levites shall shout: The curse of God be upon those involved in idol worship, or who have no respect for his father or mother, or who steals the land of his neighbor by moving the boundary marker, or who oppresses the blind, the homeless, orphan, or widow, or who commits adultery with his father’s wife, or has sexual intercourse with an animal or with his sister or with his mother-in-law, and upon him who kills, or contracts for money to kill, an innocent person, or upon one who does not agree to obey these laws. After each curse shouted by the Levites, the people upon Mount Ebal are to shout ‘Amen’.

“From another mountain, the remaining people will shout ‘Amen’ as the Levites shout blessings, including blessings for the city, field, many children, abundant crops, numerous cattle, sheep, and full storehouses. If you obey God’s laws, you will receive these blessings. If you don’t you will receive the curses yelled out by the Levites and also fever, plagues, drouth, defeat in war, boils, incurable loathsome diseases, itch, madness, blindness, uncertainty, loss of fiance, home, farm, cattle and oxen, with plagues of insects and locusts upon your crops, and finally you will endure such depravity that you will eat your own sons and daughters. Then, you will be completely obliterated.”

29: Moses reminded the people of their delivery from Egypt by Yahweh and submitted to them a contract with Jehovah. “Choose this contract with the blessing,” he demanded, “or — take the curse.”

Then Moses called for Joshua, wrote out Yahweh’s laws which he had proclaimed, and gave them to the Priest, with copies to the Israel elders. He directed that the rules should be read every seven years during the Festival of Tabernacles.

Yahweh came to Moses and Joshua as they stood near the Tabernacle entrance. “Moses,” Yahweh intoned, “you will soon die. Your people will break the contract, and My wrath shall destroy many of them. Write these words as a song for the people to remind them that their disobedience is the reason for their troubles.”

So Moses then delivered Yahweh’s song message to the people: “The Lord is perfect, but Israel has become sinful and perverse. How foolish they are — for when the Most High divided up the world, He selected, of all the nations, Israel as His own. He, Himself, is their personal guardian. They are His people. He gave them rich land, and honey, fruit, oil, milk and meat, including fat

Bashan rams, wheat and wine. Yet His people forsook and neglected Him.

“Jehovah’s anger is unquenchable, and He loathes His fickle followers who now are worshipping another god; He will give His blessings to the foolish Gentile peoples; He will cause the Israelites to be hungry and sick and to suffer attacks by snakes, wild animals and plagues. Still, when God’s people, the Israelite, shall have slipped and fallen back, His mercy will reach out to them. Can’t they see that Jehovah, alone, is God.”

33: Moses gave this blessing: “Yahweh came to us at Mount Sinai, Mount Seir, and Mount Paran with fire in his fist and leading a delegation of 10,000 angels. He loved His people. His people have obeyed. Let Reuben live forever, join Judah with Israel, give to Levi God’s Urim and Thummim, keep Benjamin safe, bless the land of Joseph, Ephraim, Manasseh, and Zebulun; Issachar shall have the outdoors, the trophies of the sea and the land; the lands of Gad shall be enlarged; Dan shall have a raider’s strength and swiftness; Naphtali the southwest as his home; and the Asher the respect of his brothers.”

Then Yahweh showed Moses the Promised Land from Pisgah Peak, opposite Jericho, but denied him access to it.

Moses died in the land of Moab.

Moses performed wondrous works at God’s command. There has never been another like him.

JOSHUA

Comment

The author or authors of Joshua are unknown.
Traditionalists credit Joshua with authorship.

* * * * *

1: Yahweh informed Joshua: "The land of Israel shall extend from the wilderness of the southwest to Lebanon in the north, and westward from the Euphrates River to the Mediterranean Sea. Be a strong, aggressive leader. Read the laws Moses left you to the people from time to time."

Joshua employed two of his men to spy in Jericho, a city located across Jordan from their Shittim encampment. The spies entered the city, sought shelter, and were about to retire at the house of Rahab, a prostitute, when the king's guards knocked at the door. "Rahab," the officers demanded as they searched, "give us the enemy spies."

"They are not here," lied Rahab, who had concealed the men before answering the door.

After the officers had gone, Rahab brought the men from their hiding place. She asked that the Israelites spare her and her family when they captured her city, Jericho. The men agreed. When they reported to Joshua's camp, they included their account with Rahab.

The next day Joshua led his army from Shittim toward the Jordan River, with priests carrying the Ark of the Covenant some distance ahead of the main body of troops. Joshua told them: "When we reach the Jordan, the waters of the river will recede and the army will be able to cross on dry ground."

Sure enough, when the priests carrying the Ark touched the water, the stream stopped flowing. The Israelis' army and supplies crossed the river on dry ground while the priests stood in the river bottom. When the priests came out of the water, the river resumed its flow.

Having successfully forded the Jordan, Joshua required the Israelites to build a monument of twelve stones to forever thereafter remind them of the miracle of the river crossing.

They camped at Gilgal, delaying their invasion in order that the entire male population could become circumcised (some had not theretofore been circumcised) and allow time to recover from the surgery.

The Amorites and Canaanites living in the land west of the Jordan River were terrified. They offered no resistance to Joshua and his people's pillaging of their crops and fruit. (At this time, the manna stopped, and it never fell again.)

Yahweh told Joshua: "March your army around Jericho once each day for the next six days; the priests are to lead, carrying the Ark, and blowing the ram's horn trumpet. On the seventh day, circle the city seven times and give a long blast on the ram's horn; then, upon a lusty yell from your army, the walls of the city will collapse."

Joshua followed the directions. The walls of the city fell. Amidst exultant shouts and cries of terror, the Israelites stormed inside, killing the inhabitants, men, women, boys, girls, children, oxen, sheep, donkeys, every living thing, except Rahab, the whore, and her family. (She and her family still live among the Israelites.) The city was literally and totally destroyed. Nothing remained except the silver, gold, bronze, and iron utensils, which the Israelites kept for their Temple treasury.

Then Joshua cursed the City of Jericho, and those who would rebuild it.

The word of the slaughter of the people of Jericho by Joshua and his army spread throughout the land of Canaan. Neighboring kingdoms began strengthening their defenses.

7: Flushed with the success of Joshua's rape of Jericho, a segment of Joshua's army sought and obtained Joshua's permission to attack the City of Ai, near Bethel. The Hebrews were quickly routed and many died. Joshua and the Israel elders were shocked. Dismayed, they fell face down before the Ark of Yahweh, tore their clothing and threw dust on their heads. Joshua cried out to the Lord in anguish and misgiving.

Yahweh reported to him that some of the Israelites had hidden loot in their belongings. "Therefore," He explained, "your troops were beaten. I won't help you anymore until you have destroyed the offender."

Joshua summoned the people before him, and they came in tribes, clans, families, and individually. His scrutiny of them disclosed that the guilty person was Achan, grandson of Zabdi, Zerah clan, tribe of Judah. Achan admitted taking a Babylonish garment, silver and a bar of gold, which he surrendered. The tribesmen marched Achan, his sons, daughters, oxen, donkeys, and sheep to the Valley of Achor, and there stoned them to death and burned their bodies. Yahweh's anger was thereby cooled.

With this purification, Yahweh encouraged Joshua to attack Ai with his entire army.

Joshua divided his army into two parts, hid one part in ambush behind the city and caused the other half to feint an attack, then run from the city defenders as if in defeat. By the use of this stratagem, Joshua was able to trap the forces of the city between his two armies. Of the defenders of Ai, all were slain except one, the king, who was brought to Joshua.

Then the Israelites entered the city proper and butchered the

entire population, 12,000 in all, men, women, and children. They gathered and stored the cattle and loot.

Joshua hanged the King of Ai and took the body down in the evening.

At Mount Ebal, the Israelites built an altar of large stones upon which the priests offered burnt sacrifices and offerings to the Lord. Joshua wrote upon the stones the law of Moses. There the priests stood between the two mountains and proclaimed, to the people stationed on the mountainside, the respective blessings and curses of Moses. And they answered as Moses had instructed.

Throughout Canaan went the news of the barbaric desert men and their terrible devastation of the cities of Ai and Jericho. The inhabitants began to band together to defend themselves, their families, and their homes from the lust of the savage invaders.

The people of Gibeon approached Joshua and represented that they were peoples of a distant land seeking a peace treaty whereby the Gibeons would become the slaves of Joshua and his people. The Israelite leaders agreed. When it was discovered that the Gibeons were not peoples of a distant land but were, in fact, very near neighbors, the Israelite people were angry with the leaders for allowing the Gibeonites to live. Nevertheless, the leaders kept their vow and the enslaved Gibeonites survived.

Five Amorite kings joined forces and sent their armies against Gibeon. The Gibeonites asked Joshua for help. On a forced march, Joshua's army surprised the Amorites. His people began slaughtering the routed enemy.

Then Joshua commanded the sun to stand still and the moon to stay in the valley. For twenty-four hours, Yahweh anchored the sun in its place, enabling Joshua's men to seek out, find, and butcher the helpless men of the defeated army. Only a small number escaped behind the high walls of their cities. The Israelis did not lose a single man.

The five kings, captured, appeared before Joshua. He knifed each one with his sword. He hung them up for a day, then placed their bodies in a cave at nightfall.

On that same day, Joshua led his troops into the city of Makkedah and killed every person there, man, woman and child. Entering Libnah, the procedure was repeated. Every single person, man, woman and child, was slain.

It required Joshua's besiegers two days to conquer Lachish. Not one occupant escaped. Every person there, man, woman or child, was put to the sword, just the same as they were killed at Libnah. The terrible invaders exterminated the people of Eglon and Hebron and Debir and its outlying villages. They did not allow a single survivor.

Joshua and his people became the conquerors of the whole territory, including the hill country and the lowlands, the desert

and the valleys. They slaughtered each and every one in the land, everything that breathed, just as Yahweh had commanded. At the conclusion of this campaign, Joshua's army returned to Gilgal.

When King Jabin of Hazor heard of Joshua's conquest, he formed a coalition of the kings of the northern hill country, some parts of the valleys, and some of the kings of the Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, and Jebusites. With a large force, including horses and chariots, they set out to engage Joshua, but Joshua surprised them with a frontal attack as they encamped, routing them. The Israelites executed every man of the enemy troops. As the Lord had instructed, Joshua's men hamstringed the horses of the Jabin forces and burned the chariots.

Joshua overran Hazor; his men killed every person there, old, young, weak, strong, or helpless, and razed and burned the city. The aggressive Israelites preserved the booty and cattle of the cities, but were careful to kill all the people, for so Yahweh had commanded them through Moses.

Following these conquests, the Israel territorial boundaries were from Mount Halak to Baal-gad in Lebanon. Here are some of the cities destroyed by Joshua: Heshbon, Bashan, Jericho, Ai, Jerusalem, Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish, Eglon, Gezer, Debir, Geder, Hormah, Adullam, Bethel, Hephher, Aphek, Lasharon, Madon, Taanach, Megiddo, Gilgal, and Tirzah.

All together thirty-one kings, their cities, and their people, were annihilated.

13: Still, there remained land to be conquered and peoples to be eliminated. The land of the Philistines, Geshuri, Avvites in the south, the Gebalites in the west, and the land of the Sidonians had not been subdued. The Lord instructed Joshua, in making a division of the land among the tribes, to include this land with the land which they had already conquered, inasmuch as He was prepared to drive the residents from this area also.

The division of the land was determined by lot. Joshua, with the help of the Priest, apportioned the land among the twelve tribes.

Judah was given the land immediately west of the Dead Sea to the Mediterranean coast, including the City of Hebron (except that Caleb was given the City of Hebron). Joseph received the hill country from Bethel to the Mediterranean (this included Ephraim and the half-tribe of Manasseh). Benjamin took the land immediately west of the Jordan River near Jericho and Jerusalem. Simeon received the southwest portion of Palestine, including the cities of Beer-sheba and Ashan. Zebulun was apportioned Bethlehem and the hill country. Issachar was given Jezreel and the valleys off the hills. Asher kept the land around Mount Carmel, twenty-two cities in all. Naphtali received the area immediately north of the Sea of Galilee west of the Jordan River.

The tribe of Dan was assigned the land west of the Jordan River opposite the Naphtali domain.

As some of this territory was unconquered, the tribes were urged by Joshua and the priests to wrest from the possession of native dwellers any part of their allotment so occupied. Joshua then selected cities of refuge which were: Kedesh of Galilee, Shechem in Ephraim, and Hebron in Judah, all west of the Jordan River; and Bezer, Ramoth, and Golan on the east side of the Jordan. These cities were places of safety for those who might accidentally kill some person.

The Levites reminded Joshua that Moses had promised them cities for their homes and acreage for their cattle. Joshua selected from all Israel forty-eight cities and surrounding pastures thereof whereby the Levites might live and serve the people.

22: Joshua assembled the men of the tribes of Reuben, Gad and Manasseh and gave them leave to depart for their homeland which had been given them prior to the conquest of the land west of the Jordan. In their homeward journey, they built a mammoth stone altar on the west bank of the Jordan River.

The presence of the altar created alarm in the Israelites remaining in Canaan. They mobilized for war, but sent Phinehas the Priest as ambassador to meet with the leaders of those eastern tribes to ascertain their intentions. When the priest learned that these tribes of the east had no intention of rebelling against the west, either political or religious, the priests were satisfied and withdrew their troops.

Many years later, Joshua, an old man, called his people together, including the officials, judges, and elders, and advised: "Follow the writings of Moses; do not intermarry with the peoples around you; do not worship other gods."

Then he recited the story of their escape from Egypt and their conquest of the land of the Canaanites. He asked for the peoples' promise to worship Yahweh alone, forsaking other gods. They agreed that they would put away all the idols which they possessed; Joshua made a contract with them that they would do so.

A little while later, Joshua died. He was 110 years old.

The bones of Joseph were buried in Shechem. Both Eleazar and Joshua were buried in the hill country of Ephraim.

JUDGES

Comment

The text of the Judges purports to show events of the years 1250 to 1050 B.C. Some say that Samuel wrote this history only one hundred years or so after its occurrence. Some say that the texts imply a time of authorship later than the destruction of Shiloh; others claim the writings suggest a writing date under the monarchy or a date after the Assyrian invasion.

It appears that the writing occurred during a period when Judah and Samaria were intensely competitive (after 500 B.C.). It is unlikely that Samuel was the author, though that may be immaterial. It is quite possible that he set down some of the oral legends growing out of his people's struggles one hundred years before his time.

* * * * *

1: After Joshua died, the Israelites continued their slaughter of the inhabitants of Canaan. Judah and Simeon's troops slew 10,000 of them at Bezek, capturing their king and cutting off his thumbs and big toes. Then Judah fought the Canaanites in the mountains of the south, in Hebron, Sheshai, Ahiman, Debir, Hormah, Gaza, Ashkelon, and Ekron, exterminating the people of those cities. Their army was led by Othni-el, Caleb's nephew, who was rewarded for his victory with one of Caleb's daughters as his bride.

However, Judah failed to defeat the people of the valleys (they had iron chariots) and although Judah had once conquered a part of Jerusalem and massacred its people, the tribe of Benjamin failed to drive out the Jebusites living there, and the Jebusites continue to live in Jerusalem with the Israelis.

The tribe of Joseph was successful, capturing the City of Bethel and the surrounding territory, but Manasseh failed altogether in Dor, Megiddo, and the surrounding towns. The Canaanites remained there entrenched. In Gezer, the tribe of Ephraim permitted the Canaanites to stay.

Likewise, Zebulun did not annihilate the people of Kitron, and Asher allowed residents of Sidon and neighboring towns to remain. The Naphtali tribe allowed the Canaanites to live among them as servants, and the Amorites chased the tribe of Dan into the mountains. In these several areas, the Israelis at times made the occupants thereof their slaves, and in other places they simply allowed the Canaanites to remain.

Yahweh announced to the Israelites: "We made a contract when I brought you forth from the land of Egypt and I promised that I would never break My agreement with you. But since you did not obey (the order to exterminate and oust the Canaanites), I withdraw My promise that I would drive out the peoples living in

the land which I have given you. I leave these peoples as an harassment to you and a temptation, in order that I may test you as to whether you will obey Me."

3: Some of the nations left by Yahweh in the lands subjected by the Israelites were: Philistines, Canaanites, Sidonians, Hivites, Hittites, Amorites, and Jebusites.

The Israel young intermarried with these natives, and soon the Israelites were worshiping their gods, principally Baal.

Yahweh, angered by their neglect of Him, withheld His help when Chushan, of Mesopotamia, attacked them, and they were conquered and thereafter ruled by foreign reign for eight years. Othni-el led the people of Israel back to Yahweh worship. He organized them and made war against the Mesopotamians (Syrians), defeating them. For the next forty years, under the leadership of Othni-el, there was peace and obedience to Yahweh.

Once again the people of Israel turned to sin; they were conquered and dominated, with the assistance of Yahweh, by the Moabites, the Ammonites, and the Amalekites, under which states the Israelites lived for the next eighteen years.

The oppressed Israelites, in tears and despair, cried out to Jehovah, and He again sent them a savior. His name was Ehud. He obtained an audience with the Moabite king, Eglon, on the pretense of presenting him with presents. As soon as Ehud was in the ruler's presence, he withdrew a knife from beneath his cloak, fatally stabbed the king, and fled. When he returned to the Ephraim mountains, he organized guerrillas and successfully maintained an armed campaign against the Moabites. Thus, the Israelites lived free of domination for the next eighty years, though from time to time there were affrays and confrontations with the neighboring nations.

Once, Shamgar killed 600 Philistines with an ox goad.

Once again, the Israelites sinned, and once again, they were subjected to foreign rule, this time by Jabin of Canaan. Because he had iron chariots, he was able to dominate the Israelites for twenty years. They turned to Yahweh.

Deborah, a prophetess, who was Israel's judge then, induced Barak to lead an army against Jabin's iron chariots. Barak was victorious. The general of the defeated army, seeking refuge from the defeat, lay down in Jael's tent and fell asleep. Jael hammered a sharp tent nail through his temples as he slept. Deborah and Barak sang a song praising God, and themselves, reciting their victory, and chiding those tribes which did not assist them, describing the division of the booty and the girl captives. Peace was with them for forty years.

When the people neglected Jehovah, were sinful, or worshipped other gods, Jehovah would permit or cause a neighboring tribe or

nation to attack and subdue them. Along with defeat came high taxes, enslavement, and other miseries. But when the people cried out and returned to their obedience of Jehovah, Jehovah would have pity upon them, deliver them from their conqueror, and give them victory and peace. Yet the people continually, after a generation or so, backslid into sin.

They were conquered by the Midianites and cried out for help, and God called upon Gideon. Gideon was unbelieving, and he asked the angel-messenger for proof of His miracles. He baked a goat and placed it, with cakes, upon a stone. The angel caused the meat and bread to be consumed by fire. Gideon built an altar and sacrificed an ox, and destroyed the altar of Baal.

But Gideon was not wholly convinced, and he asked God for another miracle. He placed wool on the floor and told an angel that the next morning the fleece should be wet and the ground dry. The next morning, so it was, but Gideon was not satisfied. He told Yahweh that they should do the same thing, but the next morning the fleece should remain dry and the ground surrounding the fleece would be wet with dew. And it was.

7: Jerubbaal (Gideon) recruited a large army to fight the Midianites. Jehovah told him that there would be no demonstration of the Lord's assistance to him with that many men and urged him to send some of the men home. So Gideon sent 22,000 of the faint-hearted away.

God said there was still too many. He instructed Gideon to bring the men to the water's edge and separate them into two groups, the first bunch consisting of those who knelt to drink directly from the stream, and the second group being those who lapped the water from their hands. Jehovah selected for Gideon's task force three hundred of the men who lapped the water from their hands.

That night Gideon's men attacked the Midianites, carrying torches midst a din of blaring trumpets. The officers and men of the Midian and Amalek armies became confused and panicked. Soon they were in flight. Gideon called upon the troops of Naphtali, Asher, and Manasseh to assist in chasing the routed enemy.

The victory was complete, and as they crossed through the areas occupied by Succoth and Penuel pursuing Midian-Amalek remnants, they sought food and sustenance from the natives. They were refused. After the victory, Gideon returned by way of Succoth and Penuel and executed the entire male population of Penuel and the leaders of Succoth.

The people had known peace for forty years when Gideon's son, Abimelech (son of Gideon's concubine), killed seventy of his half-brothers (except Jotham, the younger) and assumed the leadership of the nation.

During Abimelech's coronation ceremony by the citizens of

Shechem, Jotham called out to them from a hilltop:

"Once the trees decided to choose a king. In turn, the throne was offered to the olive tree, fig tree, and the grapevine, and each of them refused, saying 'Why should I stop making fruit and sweetness just so that I can appear mightier or taller than the other trees'. So," said Jotham, "the trees elected the bramble bush king. And so it is with your choice of Abimelech."

Sure enough, during Abimelech's reign, the men of Shechem turned against him. In quashing the rebellion, many Israelites on both sides were killed. At Zalmon, Abimelech's men burned the fort where approximately a thousand men and women had taken refuge, killing all inside. Abimelech was killed by a woman who threw a stone from the walls as he and his men attacked Thebez.

Tola became the judge of Israel and reigned for twenty-three years, during which time the people were content. After the death of Jair, the Israelites again turned to the worship of Baal and Ashtaroth, and the gods of Syria, Sidon, Moab, Ammon and Philistia. So Jehovah permitted the Philistines and the Ammonites to harass them for the next eighteen years.

Then, once again, the Israelites asked Jehovah to forgive. Jehovah answered them: "Don't come to Me. I have saved you many times in the past, but now you have chosen other gods. Go to them with your troubles."

But the Israelites put away their strange idols and looked for another savior to help them overcome the attacks of the Ammonites. They chose Jephthah.

11: Jephthah was a bandit leader who had been exiled from his father's home by his half-brothers because his mother was a prostitute. He had overcome harsh circumstances by cruel and aggressive effort. The Israelites needed Jephthah's warring ability and his experience and they offered him the high command of their forces.

Jephthah's first act was to ask the king of Ammon why Israel was being harassed by them. The king replied, "The Israelites stole the land from us when they came from Egypt. We want the land restored to us."

"It was not us, but our God, Jehovah, who dispossessed you and gave it to us," Jephthah answered. "You Ammonites keep whatever Chemosh, your god, gives you," he reasoned, "why shouldn't we occupy the land Jehovah helped us conquer? Notice," he added, "we took the land of the Moabites and their King Balak has not made any attempt to recover it."

Jephthah's army attacked and won over the Ammonites, capturing twenty cities, completely subduing those peoples.

Jephthah had made an agreement with Jehovah, a vow, that if the Lord should give him victory over Ammon he would make a

burnt offering of the first person coming out of his house to meet him when he returned home. Alas, a joyous, happy, and only daughter saw him as he approached and came running to greet and embrace him. He cried out in pain and sorrow and tore his clothes.

Following a brief period given his daughter for weeping, Jephthah kept his vow. He burned his lovely child upon the altar of Jehovah.

During Jephthah's six year reign as judge, he attacked and defeated the tribe of Ephraim, blockading them from access to the Jordan River. When a person attempted to cross the river, the Jephthah guards would order him: "Say, 'Shibboleth'." If he failed to pronounce the "h", saying Sibboleth, they then knew that he was of the tribe of Ephraim and they killed him. Jephthah forces killed 42,000 of the tribe of Ephraim.

Then Ibzan was judge for seven years, Elon for ten, and Abdon eight, and all was peaceful.

But Israel was weak and backslid into sin. They were promptly overpowered by the Philistines, who ruled them forty years. Jehovah caused Samson to be born to a barren woman of the tribe of Dan, who, prior to Samson's birth, abstained from drinking any wine or strong drink, or eating any food forbidden to her race.

14: As a young man, Samson fell in love with a Philistine girl in the City of Timnah. On the way to Timnah to make arrangements for the wedding, Samson killed a lion, and on his return from Timnah he noticed that bees had made their home in the body of the lion and had made some honey, some of which he took and ate.

A short time later, during the bachelor's party, Samson told thirty young men who were celebrating with him that if they could guess an answer to his riddle concerning the honey and the lion, that he would give them sixty robes. The young men induced Samson's young bride to secure the answer to the riddle from Samson and disclose the secret to them. They were, therefore, able to answer Samson's riddle.

Samson, enraged, rushed into the city proper, killed thirty men, took their clothing, and returned the garments to the young men with whom he had lost the bet. He abandoned his wife; she married the man who had served him as a friend.

Later, Samson changed his mind and returned to his wife, but was rejected. She had already remarried. Irked, Samson caught 300 foxes, divided them in pairs, tied a firebrand to the tails of each pair and set them loose in the cornfields of the Philistines. The Philistine citizens, distraught over their loss and seeking vengeance, turned on the girl and her father for having caused Samson's anger, and burned them at the stake.

The men of Judah captured Samson, with his consent, and

delivered him to the Philistines. While in the midst of the Philistines, Samson broke his bonds and, using the jawbone of an ass as a weapon, killed a thousand of them. After this effort, a thirsty, exhausted Samson prayed to Jehovah. Jehovah caused water to spring from the ground and Samson drank, and was revived.

During Samson's twenty years as judge, the Philistines reigned supreme. Once, he was almost captured when he spent the night in Gaza with a prostitute. Then he fell in love with Delilah. The Philistines connived with Delilah whereby Delilah coaxed and induced Samson to disclose that his great strength lay in his long hair. One day, as he rested his head, asleep, on her knees, she cut his hair and delivered him to the Philistines. They bound him and put out his eyes.

But Samson's hair grew long again, and when he was brought into the Philistines' temple filled with people, he pushed against the pillars of the temple, causing the temple to collapse, killing himself and the Philistines therein.

Micah, of the Ephraim mountains, owned some idols, and when a young Levite from Bethlehem made application, he hired the youth as his personal priest.

The tribe of Dan had learned that the town of Laish was undefended and were on the way to pillage it when they approached Micah's home. They robbed Micah of his idols and invited the young priest to go with them in their enterprise. The young priest accepted. The tribe of Dan razed the city and slaughtered the peaceful and unprotected inhabitants. They rebuilt the town, naming it Dan, set up the idols which they had stolen from Micah, and named Jonathan, grandson of Moses, and his sons, as their priests.

19: During this time when Israel had no king, the concubine (wife) of one of the Levites living in the Ephraim hill country ran away to Bethlehem; her husband journeyed to Bethlehem and visited with her and her father for several days in order to induce her to return. Finally she consented.

On their homeward journey, they were offered shelter and lodging by an old man in Gibe-ah. As the Levite and his wife rested there, a crowd of men gathered outside and demanded that the Levite be surrendered to them in order that they could sexually molest him.

The old man offered them his virgin daughter and the wife of his guest, but they were not pacified. The Levite pushed his wife out the door and the men took her. During the night she was raped repeatedly and otherwise severely abused. At dawn they let her go, and she came to where her husband was sleeping and fell down at the door.

In mid-morning, the husband opened the door to continue his

journey and found his wife there, lying still, with cold hands gripping the doorway. He prompted her to go, but she did not answer. Now realizing that she had died, he tied her body upon an ass and carried her home. There he cut her up into twelve parts and sent one part to each tribe of Israel.

The citizens of Israel were incensed!

Eleven tribes of Israel rose up against the City of Gibe-ah. Only the Benjamites defended it, and very well, beating off two thrusts of the superior forces before capitulating. Jehovah awarded the victory to the Israeli army, who killed 25,100 men, leaving only a few of the weak and disabled. Their thirst for vengeance unquenched, the Israelites rampaged through the villages and cities in the land of Benjamin, slaughtering the entire population of the tribe, men, women, children, and cattle. Every city, each hamlet, was leveled and burned.

Then the Israeli leaders had second thoughts. They bemoaned the fact that one of the twelve tribes was now missing. Recalling that they had not received help in their fight against Benjamin from the City of Jabesh-gilead, they attacked that city and killed all the men, married women, and children, except young virgins of marriageable age. There were about four hundred of these virgins, and they were returned to Shiloh as wives for a few of those Benjamites that remained.

The tribes of Israel had vowed never to let their daughters marry a man from the tribe of Benjamin. They decided that the men of Benjamin who needed wives could hide in the vineyards; when the girls of Shiloh came out in the fields for their religious festivals, they would be captured by the men of Benjamin and taken home for their wives. In this way, the Israel people could keep their vow to Jehovah, and yet allow the men of Benjamin to acquire wives, and the tribe would not be lost to history.

RUTH

Comment

Fact or fiction? Author unknown.

Many scholars claim the book of Ruth is a novel, a protest against the policies of Ezra and Nehemiah in the fourth or fifth centuries B.C.

Guesses for the date of authorship range anywhere from 100 years before the time of David to three or four hundred B.C. Some time in that thousand year period the novel, or record, was written.

* * * * *

During the rule of the judges, Bethlehem and its neighbors were subjected to famine. Elimelech and his wife, Naomi, migrated to the land of Moab in order to sustain themselves. Elimelech and his sons died, leaving Naomi and her daughters-in-law, Moabites Orpah and Ruth.

Naomi decided to return to Bethlehem. Ruth elected to go with her mother-in-law.

While Ruth was working in the fields, she was noticed by a wealthy man named Boaz, who showed her singular attention, love and kindness. Ruth offered herself to Boaz, even though Boaz was much older than she, and though another relative in the village had first claim to her.

Boaz, in the presence of witnesses, gave the relative an opportunity to buy certain land, which carried with it the right to have Ruth as a wife. The relative refused. And the right was transferred to Boaz.

So Boaz married Ruth and when he slept with her, the Lord gave her a son. The son was named Obed.

Here is the genealogy of Pharez, ancestor of Boaz:

Pharez, Hezron, Ram, Amminadab, Nahshon, Salmon, Boaz, Obed, Jesse, David.

I and II SAMUEL

Comment

Author or authors unknown. It was not Samuel.

Time of events: neighborhood of 1100 B.C.

There may have been sources of earlier origin available to the author, but the books could not have been written by him, her, or them, before the death of Solomon or before 10th Century B.C. Unquestionably, the author relied on earlier sources, including, perhaps, the Haggada, in writing the material. Guesses are that the greater part of the texts were written somewhere between the time of the exile, 6th Century B.C., and the 10th Century B.C.

* * * * *

I SAMUEL

1: Hannah was barren. In the Tabernacle, she prayed for a son. In due time, she became pregnant and give birth to a boy, Samuel. When the baby was weaned, she returned to the Tabernacle and gave the son to Jehovah, leaving the babe with Eli, the priest at the Tabernacle.

As the child became older, he, along with the sons of Eli, assisted Eli in his priestly duties in his work around the Tabernacle.

The sons of Eli were greedy and irresponsible. As sacrifices were being made, they often took meat before the fat was burned, and were greedy in the portions given them as between them and the donor. They also whoremongered among the young women who habitually loitered at the Tabernacle doors.

Jehovah, displeased with these outrages and impatient with the mild reprimands Eli gave his sons, announced: "Even though I promised the branch of the tribe of Levi the perpetual inheritance of the priesthood, I have changed My mind; I will honor only those who honor Me, and those who despise Me shall not merit My attention. Therefore, the priestly prestige which Eli's family has enjoyed will soon end. I will give the people prosperity, but Eli and his family grief, poverty, and early death."

The Lord favored Samuel and revealed Himself to him, and the people knew that Samuel was to be their prophet.

The Israelites consistently lost in battle engagements with the Philistines. They decided that their success would be better if they were led by the Ark of the Lord. On their first encounter, the Ark was captured by the Philistines, and Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were killed. When Eli learned his sons were dead and the Ark was captured, he fell from his seat, breaking his neck, and died.

The Philistines had trouble with the Ark. First of all, their idol, Dagon, persisted in repeatedly falling face-down before it; and

then Jehovah sent a plague of boils upon the people of the city (Ashdod) who held the Ark. When the Philistines carried the Ark to Gath, the Lord sent a plague upon the people of Gath. The Philistines, in fear and panic, loaded the Ark, together with solid gold images of mice and boils (representing the plagues), upon a cart, hitched two cows to the cart and loosed them.

The cows wandered into the Israelite fields, enabling the tribesmen to recover their Ark. The ensuing celebration of song, sacrificial offerings, and feast was interrupted when Jehovah killed fifty thousand seventy men of Beth-shemesh because they looked in the Ark. The mourning villagers were relieved to have the Ark removed by men of a nearby city (Kirjath-jearim), who placed it in the home of Abinadab. There it stayed for the next twenty years.

7: At Mizpah, Samuel commanded the people to destroy their idols of Baal and Ashtaroth and serve only Jehovah. It was there that Samuel became Israel's judge. It was there that the Philistines attacked them as they were gathered for their religious festival, but Jehovah was with them in their defense and they won. Samuel was Israel's judge for his entire lifetime.

Samuel's sons, Joel and Abiah, were poor administrators, easily bribed, and irrational in judgment. The people asked Samuel for a king. "This means that they are rejecting Me," Jehovah told Samuel. "Tell them what a king would be like, and if they still want him, then give them a king."

So Samuel told the people that a king would draft their sons for the army, for labor on his farms, and for carpenters and weapon makers; that the king would force their daughters to work in his palace as cooks and beauticians, take the best of the fields, a tenth of the harvest, their healthiest animals and their finest young men. The populace shouted their demands for a ruler.

So when Saul, of the tribe of Benjamin, who was handsome, strong and tall and the son of a rich man, came to visit Samuel, Samuel anointed him with oil and sent him on his way. A short time later, Samuel assembled the Israel tribes at Mizpah, and, after considering every man from every family from each tribe, selected Saul, the son of Kish, as the new king. The choice was not unanimous and many grumbled.

About this time, the citizens of Jabesh-gilead sought help of their Israeli neighbors in defending themselves from the Ammonites, whose army had threatened to gouge out the right eye of each and every citizen of that city when the battle had been won.

Saul, with the spirit of Jehovah upon him, mustered arms and men from the twelve tribes. They attacked the Ammonites and were victorious.

Triumphantly, Saul was again crowned king in a joyful ceremony of sacrifices before Jehovah at Gilgal, and Samuel gave a speech:

"I remind you that Jehovah chose Moses and Aaron to lead your fathers from Egypt. When you sinned, you suffered, but Jehovah had pity upon you and sent you inspired leaders such as Gideon, Barak, Jephthah, and Samson to save you from your oppressors. Jehovah was already your king, but you demanded another, and even that has been given you.

"To demonstrate Jehovah's power, I pray that it rains."

Thunder rumbled and the rain fell. The people feared both Samuel and Jehovah.

13: For two years, Saul enjoyed a tranquil reign. Then his son, Jonathan, led Israeli troops against the Philistine garrison at Geba and leveled it. The Philistines gathered a mighty army consisting of thirty thousand chariots, six thousand horsemen, and many, many soldiers, and set themselves for the attack upon meager Israeli forces. The Israelites, upon seeing the size and extent of their enemy, panicked. Many of the military fled. Some escaped to other lands. Others hid in the caves and hills.

Saul, himself, instead of waiting for Samuel as he had been directed, made burnt offerings to the Lord. When Samuel did come and saw what Saul had done, he reproached Saul and departed, leaving Saul and the six hundred soldiers that remained with him to their fate.

Saul's assembled soldiers set themselves; the enemy approached and Saul's son, Jonathan, and another youth, made a night raid into the Philistine camp, killing twenty men. During the fighting, the earth began to tremble and shake, adding to the uproar. The Philistine soldiers began fighting each other. Saul, seeing the riotous melee, led six hundred men against the confused Philistines; they fought all that day.

During the day, Saul decreed a curse on anyone who ate anything before evening (before his revenge on the Philistines was complete), but Jonathan had not heard his father's curse, and he ate honeycomb which he found on the ground in the woods. That night, Saul asked Jehovah whether he should pursue the Philistines further, and the Lord did not answer. Saul knew then that Jehovah was displeased.

After learning it was Jonathan who had eaten, Saul decreed that Jonathan should be executed. But the soldiers refused to permit Saul to kill Jonathan since Jonathan was the savior of the day.

Saul's armies, revitalized by the victory, successfully attacked Moab, Ammon, Edom, the kings of Zobah and the Philistines.

A short time later, Samuel charged Saul: "The Lord remembers

that the Amaleks harassed His people as they traveled from Egypt. He orders that you completely annihilate the Amalek nation — kill the men, women, babies, children, ox, cattle, sheep, camels, and asses — and raze the cities." Saul promptly organized a huge armed force and sent them in one wave against inferior Amalekite defenses, capturing their king, Agag, slaughtering the Amalek troops and butchering the population. But Saul and his men destroyed only what they didn't want. The fat animals and other valuable booty was saved.

Jehovah regretted that He had ever made Saul king of Israel.

When Samuel discovered that Saul and his men had not exterminated every living thing, but had kept some of the animals for themselves, he censured Saul for his disobedience to the Lord. "The Lord has now rejected you as king of Israel," Samuel told him.

For appearances sake, however, Samuel and Saul appeared before the Israelites in the worship of the Lord at Gilgal. During those services, Samuel chopped King Agag into little pieces with his sword.

Jehovah instructed Samuel to go to see Jesse, in Bethlehem, and appoint one of his sons the new king. The youngest of these sons was David. It was David whom Samuel chose.

At about the same time, Saul, tormented with hallucinations and anxieties, received David into his household to be a companion and musician as a balm to his feverish nature.

17: Once the Philistines and the Israelis faced each other across the Elah valley, but the Israelis were afraid to attack. Goliath, who was nine feet tall, heavily armored, bearing shield and spear, challenged the Israelis:

"Send out your strongest warrior to fight me; if he kills me, the Philistines will be your slaves; if I kill him, you will serve us."

Young David, who, until recently, had been shepherding his father's sheep, and was in camp only to deliver to his older brothers some food and clothing, heard the giant's offer. He volunteered to meet the giant, and this news was dispatched to Saul. Saul, though skeptical, gave David the chance.

With deliberation, David, carrying only his slingshot, five smooth stones, and his shepherd's staff, ventured forth. As Goliath cursed and jeered him, David hurled a stone from his sling. It struck Goliath's forehead, stunning him, and the giant crashed to the ground. As he lay there in a stupor, David cut off his head with his own sword.

The Philistines took to their heels and the Israelites exultantly rushed after them, butchering them as far as Gath and Ekron. On their return to camp, the Israelis pillaged the abandoned Philistine encampment.

Of course Saul was very pleased, and he gave David a choice command. David and Jonathan (Saul's son) became inseparable friends.

After a while, Saul became jealous of David because the populace appeared to prefer David over Saul in their songs of praise of the two men. One day, Saul, in temper, threw his javelin at David, narrowly missing. Once, as Saul was sulking, Saul attempted to spear David again, but David adroitly jumped aside. Then Saul appointed David captain of a small company of men and removed him from the palace.

Michal, Saul's youngest daughter, had fallen in love with David — and he with her. Saul offered Michal to David for a wife in exchange for one hundred dead Philistines. David was overjoyed and he, with a few select fighting men, sallied forth, slew two hundred Philistines, and brought back their foreskins as proof to King Saul. David and Michal were married.

On several occasions, Saul proposed that his servants assassinate David, but Jonathan would dissuade him. Finally, however, the jealous Saul could stand the popularity of David no longer; it became apparent to David that he must escape. Encouraged by his wife, Michal, he fled the city.

David sought refuge with Samuel. When Saul sent guards to capture David, the Spirit of God came upon the guards and they began to prophesy, resulting in an unsuccessful mission. This happened three times; finally, Saul, with a company of men, went to Rabah where Samuel and David sojourned. On his trip there, however, the Spirit of Jehovah came upon him and he tore off his clothes and, lying naked, began to prophesy.

From time to time, Jonathan reported to David his father's intentions. He learned that Saul intended to kill David and relayed this message to his friend. David went to Nob, was given sustenance by the priests there, and then to Gath and to the Cave of Adullam, where his relatives and friends joined him. David's forces numbered about four hundred men.

When Saul learned that David had been helped by the priests in the City of Nob, he ordered them executed. One of his assistants murdered all eighty-five priests, their families (men, women and children), and slew their oxen, asses and sheep.

23: For the most part, David and his men stayed in Judah, hiding in caves and mountains to avoid Saul's search of him. He made a raid with his men at Keilah against the Philistines, and when Saul learned of it, he raced to the area in the hope of capturing David there. But David, warned by the Lord through the ephod, was gone when Saul arrived.

David retained Abiathar, a priest, who had an ephod, and who, therefore, could talk with the Lord through it (perhaps through the Urim and Thummim). Jehovah advised David, through the

ephod in the priest's skilled hands, that Saul would not tire of the search for him. David continued to hide in the caves throughout the countryside.

Once, in Saul's search in the Engedi wilderness, he stopped at a cave to relieve himself. David and his men were hiding there, so close that, while Saul was using the toilet, David cut off a piece from Saul's robe.

When Saul had moved but a short distance, David shouted out to him his loyalty, exhibiting his proof of his opportunity to kill him, and his refusal to allow his followers this act.

Saul cried out sorrowfully: "I thank thee, David, for my life today. Swear that when you become king of Israel, that you will not kill my sons and leave me without descendants." David promised — the men departed.

Samuel died and was buried at Ramah.

David, wandering through the Paran wilderness, sent requests to a nearby wealthy shepherd, Nabal, for food and clothing. Nabal refused. David prepared to raid Nabal's home, vowing that he would kill Nabal, his servants and men.

Abigail, Nabal's wife, intercepted David's band, bringing bread, meat and many presents. "Forget my husband," she told David. "He is a stupid dolt." David conceded that he would allow Nabal his life. But when Abigail went home, she found her husband very, very drunk. Next morning, when his wife told him of his narrow escape with David's raiders, his heart died within him and he became as stone.

Jehovah had killed him.

Abigail was a beautiful woman. David desired her. She consented to be one of his wives. He also married Ahino-am.

While Saul was camped near Gibe-ah, David and Abishai silently stole through the encampment, taking with them Saul's spear and canteen. Halfway up the hillside, they paused, and David shouted: "Here is your spear, Saul. As you can see, I have no intention of hurting you. Why do you pursue me? What evil have I done?" Saul vowed: "No longer will I try to harm you, David. I apologize. I have been foolish." He made no attempt to follow as David left.

David, still afraid that Saul would someday capture him, made an armistice with the Philistines whereby he, his six hundred men, and their families, were given refuge in Gath under the protection of King Achish. They lived there sixteen months as bandits, raiding the Geshurites, Gezrites and Amalekites, butchering the people in the villages they captured, pilfering many sheep, oxen, asses, camels, and clothing. (David would represent to King Achish that they were making these raids against the people of Judah. Inasmuch as David's marauders left no survivors to say otherwise, Achish believed David's lies.)

28: The Philistines mobilized for war with the Israelites, and King Achish sought David's help against them. David pledged his assistance.

In fearful apprehension, Saul watched the Philistines convene their massive military strength. He asked Jehovah for help; Jehovah made no reply, either directly or through the prophets or their devices. In disguise, Saul went to a woman of familiar spirits in Endor for advice. He requested that the woman (medium) bring up Samuel from the dead.

The witch, through her wizardry, produced Samuel from the grave, who, in answer to Saul's questions, predicted: "Your army will know defeat on the morning. You and your sons will perish."

Saul, although somewhat shaken by this news, stayed in Endor. He ate the evening meal with his men.

Despite David's eagerness to remain with him in his fight against the Israelites, King Achish ordered David and his six hundred men to retire to Philistia (Philistine officers were suspicious of David's loyalty). David's fighters turned homeward, to Ziklag, only to find upon their arrival that the Amalekites had been there, captured their women and children, and left the city in blackened ruins.

Abiathar, the priest, brought the ephod to David and through it David asked Jehovah for instructions. Jehovah's response was positive: "Pursue and slay the Amalekites." The chase was long and only two-thirds of David's force participated in the wearisome trackdown and slaughter of the malicious tribe. David's men not only rescued their families, but captured much loot. Returning, there was argument as to whether the fighting men would share the loot with the two hundred men who had stayed behind. David ruled that they would each share equally — a rule that has become an Israelite law.

On Mount Gilboa, the Philistines routed the Israelite armies, slaying the Israelites as they fled before them. Saul's sons, Jonathan, Abinadab, and Melchishua, were killed. Saul, wounded, died by his own hand, falling upon his own sword. Saul's armor bearer died in the same way.

Beyond the valley to East of the Jordan, word reached the Israelis that their army had fallen, and they abandoned their cities to the Philistines.

II SAMUEL

1: An Amalekite brought David the news that Saul was dead. The man claimed that he, at Saul's request, killed Saul.

David ordered the Amalekite executed. He and his men mourned the death of Saul and his sons by tearing their clothes, fasting, and weeping the entire day. He composed a song, which he sang, bemoaning God's chosen king.

Accompanied by his wives in a ceremony at Hebron, David was anointed King of Judah. Abner, Saul's top general, was quick to name Saul's son, Ish-bosheth, king of an area including Gilead, Jezreel, Ephraim, Benjamin, Ashuri, and that part of Israel not represented by David's kingdom.

In a short time, there was war between the two factions, and one day, General Abner's forces, for Ish-bosheth, faced the command of General Joab, for David, at Gibeon. Abner's troops fell back before Joab's superior force, and Abner retreated in haste, pursued by Asahel, brother of Joab, who was very swift. Abner could not escape him, so, with reluctance, he pierced the on-rushing Asahel with a spear, killing him.

The war between Saul's loyalists and David continued for many years. But one day Ish-bosheth found fault with Abner because Abner had slept with one of Saul's girls, Rizpah. Abner, rebuffed, plotted to betray Ish-bosheth to David. First, he arranged for David's wife, Michal (who had since remarried), to be returned to him, though this meant that Michal's second husband relinquish any claim to her.

But when Abner visited David for the purpose of betraying Ish-bosheth and delivering the troops of that king to David's command, he was attacked by a wrathful Joab (who sought vengeance for Abner's killing of Asahel), and Abner was killed. David mourned Abner's death, disclaiming any responsibility, but took no action against Joab.

4: King Ish-bosheth appointed Rechab and Baanah, renegade bandit leaders, commanders of his army. It was but a short time before they assassinated him, cut off his head, and carried the head to David. David immediately ordered the assassins killed.

At Hebron, in the presence of the Lord and the elders of all the tribes of Israel, David contracted with the leaders to represent them as king of Israel and Judah (David was king of Judah seven and one-half years and king of Israel and Judah together for thirty-three years — forty years in all).

Jerusalem at that time was occupied by the Jebusites, who were smugly sure their fortifications would withstand any assault. David entered the city via a water gutter, surprised its occupants, and quickly subdued its defenders. He organized his carpenters

and workers and made additions to the city and strengthened its defenses.

He chose for himself many additional wives and concubines and there was born to them many children, including Nathan and Solomon.

When the Philistines came to besiege the fort which David had contrived, he and his men rushed from the fortifications, and with Jehovah's help, crushed them. Soon the Philistines, with reinforced troops, renewed their attacks. David and his men again put them to flight.

David led thirty thousand men to Baal-judah, obtained the Ark of the Lord, and began the journey from Abinadab's homeland to Jerusalem. As they proceeded, with oxen pulling the wagon containing the Ark, one of the oxen faltered, causing Uzzah, who was walking beside the wagon, to accidentally touch the Ark. Jehovah, in temper, killed him immediately. David sulked, but he was afraid, so he left the Ark with Obed-edom for three months before he brought it into the city.

David wore priestly garments and danced before the Lord in the procession which brought the Ark into the city. His wife, Michal, scolded him for his impunity to God and disrespect of the priesthood. (He would have no more of her and she never bore a child.)

David desired to build a new Temple for the Ark of God. Jehovah informed Nathan, the prophet: "David will be the ruler of the people of Israel; a kingdom over the land of My people shall be established for the seed of his bowels. But I do not want him to build Me a home. I have not complained — My tent is adequate — a descendant of David will build the new Temple." Nathan delivered Jehovah's message to David who, humbled, rejoiced.

David was victorious everywhere. He smote the Philistines and captured their principal cities. He whipped the King of Moab, King Hadadezer of Zobah at the Euphrates River, and the Syrians at Damascus. His victories were absolute. Sometime the conquered were so numerous that David compelled them to lie down in rows, and David and his men killed two rows of them and left the third row of men to serve as their slaves.

He captured many chariot horses, most of which he crippled. He caused the defeated armies to contribute annually. He received revenues from the conquered peoples which he had enslaved. His men occupied Edom.

David summoned Mephibosheth, the lame son of Jonathan (Saul's grandson) to live with him in his palace and assigned servants to care for him.

10: At Elan, David, his generals, Joab and Joab's brother, Abishai, met and defeated the Ammonites even though more than thirty-three thousand Syrian troops stood with the Ammonites

against them. The war continued between the Israelites and the Ammonites, however (the Syrians were afraid to interfere any further); and, on one occasion, David sent Joab and the Army to lay siege to Rabbah.

Then David found Bath-sheba. Although she was already married (her husband, Uriah, was with Joab), he summoned her to him and slept with her. She became pregnant. Alarmed about the untimely pregnancy, David arranged a furlough or leave for Uriah through the army in order that Uriah could go home, but Uriah would not go to his wife. He was a soldier through and through.

"I will not indulge in the comforts of home and the company of my wife while my army comrades are still in the open fields," he vowed. Even when he was drunk, he refused to sleep with the beautiful Bath-sheba.

So David shook his head, wrote a letter to Joab, and sent Uriah to deliver it to General Joab at the battle-front. Joab carried out the letter's instructions and assigned Uriah to a spot where the fighting was fiercest. Uriah was killed. Bath-sheba became David's wife and bore him a son.

Jehovah was wrought. He sent Nathan to rebuke David. Nathan reproached David. David said he was sorry. Nathan advised him that the Lord had forgiven him.

Nevertheless, Jehovah caused Bath-sheba's baby to become ill, and the baby died in spite of David's prayers and fasting. David continued to lay with Bath-sheba and soon she conceived again. A son was born to her. David named him Solomon.

David's son, Amnon, pretended to be ill so that Tamar, his half-sister, would nurse him. He was deeply in love with her. When she came to attend him, he forced her, and she surrendered to him. Possessing her, his love became hate, and he put her from his room.

Tamar, in tears, put ashes on her head and tore her robe. Absalom noticed his sister in sorrow and reassured her that everything would be alright. He bided his time, and two years later, invited Amnon to a party. When Amnon arrived, Absalom's hired killers pounced upon him and slew him. Fearful of the wrath of his father, Absalom fled. More than two years passed before King David agreed to see his son, Absalom, again.

15: Absalom continued to ingratiate himself with David and at the same time pretended to interest himself with the people of influence in the city. He moved to Hebron and organized a campaign of treachery throughout Israel so that his plan for wresting the throne from David would be supported by the citizenry.

To David, the conspiracy seemed assured of success. He gathered his household and, accompanied by a bodyguard of six

hundred men (foreigners from Gath), withdrew from Jerusalem. Just beyond the view of those on the city walls, David stopped, waiting and hoping for news that the coup which Absalom had undertaken had failed. Mephibosheth sent him food and encouragement for he hoped that Absalom and David would destroy each other, and that in some way he would thereby acquire the kingdom that was once his fathers (Saul). Shime-i, a Benjamite and a Saul-loyalist, harassed David's band, cursing them and throwing rocks at them.

David's staff welcomed Absalom to Jerusalem with open arms and a brief coronation rite. They advised Absalom that, in order to widen the breach existing between himself and King David, he should sleep with David's wives. Absalom lost no time in doing so.

Absalom and his new staff sought advice from Ahithophel concerning capture of David and his men. Ahithophel urged immediate pursuit. Another adviser, Hushai (planted there by David to give wrong advice to the new king), cautioned against such action, reminding them of David's military prowess, and suggested, instead, a time consuming mobilization of the Israeli nation. The ruse worked; Absalom delayed and David was given time to escape to Mahanaim, where Ammonites (over whom Barzillai presided as king) furnished food, shelter, men, and arms. Ahithophel was so humiliated by the failure of the Israeli leaders to follow his advice that he committed suicide by hanging himself.

By the time Absalom's forces reached him, David was ready. The countryside resounded with the clash of arms and anguished cries as the two sides fought in the Ephraim forest. Decisively and relentlessly, David's troops moved forward; Absalom's men gave ground, then yielded, then fled. Thousands of men perished.

Absalom was a handsome man with long hair and, during the battle, his hair caught in an oak tree limb. His mule went out from under him leaving him hanging there helpless. When Joab, David's general, found Absalom there, he sent three arrows into his heart.

Ahima-az rushed from the battle grounds to David's headquarters in Mahanaim to tell him the good news. Joab also sent a Cushite to deliver the message to David. They arrived about the same time. Ahima-az told of the victory; the man from Cush reported Absalom's death. David cried and his tears did not stop. Finally Joab rebuked him. "Show appreciation to your men for their deeds," he reminded David, and David ceased his mourning.

On their return to Jerusalem, they met Shime-i at the head of a contingent of one thousand men, who asked forgiveness of David, and whom David publicly forgave. Shime-i committed his tribe (Benjamin) to his support. By the time they reached the Holy City,

the tribes of Israel had abandoned David. Only Judah and Benjamin remained faithful. Mephibosheth and his former staff welcomed him, begging his forgiveness for their lack of loyalty to him. The sons of King Barzillai were made honored guests in the palace and given special privileges.

David began his new reign by mobilizing an army to attack Sheba, whose Israelite rebel band was reported to be ransacking Judah villages. These troops, under Joab, besieged the town of Abel where Sheba had taken refuge. Upon Joab's demand, the people of that city threw the head of Sheba over the wall.

Then, at the end of a three year drought, Jehovah advised David that He had allowed the famine because Saul had slain the Gibeonites. So David set out to make amends. The Gibeonites wanted seven of Saul's sons. David delivered seven of Saul's grandsons to the Gibeonites who promptly hung them in a religious ceremony before Jehovah.

The conflict continued between David's men and the Philistines. The Philistine army consisted of several giants here and there and from time to time, and the Israelite heroes conquered and killed these monsters during these wars.

22: David composed many songs. When he escaped from Saul, David sang, "Jehovah is my Savior and shield, having saved me from powerful enemies. He, all conquering, has destroyed the wicked and saved the good. I rejoice that He has preserved me as ruler of heathen kings, that strangers shall serve me as well as my own people. God is with me and will subdue all who are slow to kneel before me. God, show mercy to me and my family forever."

David's last words were a song, praising Jehovah and the wonderful success he had had, for God's choice of him and his family, for the agreement everlasting that God had made with him.

Some of David's top men in battle were Adino (who single-handedly killed eight hundred men), Eleazar (he, David, and one other withstood an attack by a Philistine army), Shammah (who repelled a Philistine army attack by himself), Abishai (he defeated and killed three hundred enemy soldiers), and Benaiah (who killed two giants, a lion, and an Egyptian warrior with his own spear). There were many others, including a group called The Thirty.

David ordered that Joab take a census of all the people. Jehovah stirred, but angrily sat by while the census was taken. Joab reported that there were 800,000 young men in Israel and 500,000 in Judah.

Jehovah, through the prophet Gad, spoke: "You've had your census. You shall now have a choice — seven years of famine, three months of flight from your enemies, or three days of plague." David chose the plague.

God sent a pestilence upon Israel and in three days 70,000 men died. Even Jerusalem was threatened with extinction, but Jehovah, seeing the danger, compassionately stayed the death angel at the threshing floor of Araunah, the Jebusite. David, on Jehovah's command, built an altar to Jehovah on Araunah's threshing floor. He offered burnt and peace offerings; then the Lord halted the plague.

I KINGS

Comment

Jewish tradition attributes Kings to Jeremiah.

But Jeremiah, around 600 B.C., was taken to Egypt by the pro-Egypt party, while the text, say the critics, indicates an author knowing Babylon personally. Perhaps the recorder was an unknown writer who lived in Babylon around 550 B.C. Perhaps a number of people, at different times, contributed something to this work.

Kings is an account of the struggle of the young Jewish nation to survive under various royal rulers during 1000 - 600 B.C.

* * * * *

1: King David had many wives and concubines, but as he grew older, he became very cold-natured. His assistants searched the nation for someone suitable for him. They discovered a beautiful young virgin, Abishag, and brought her to the king, who made her his wife and slept with her, but only for warmth.

In these declining years, he had little control over his family.

Adonijah, David's son by Haggith, decided that he would take his father's throne. He hired servants and chariots as a front to add credence to his claim. He was aided in his effort by General Joab and the priest Abiathar; on the other hand, Adonijah could not get Zadok (priest), Benaiah (priest), Nathan (prophet), Shime-i, Rei, or other prominent citizens to help him.

Nathan and Bath-sheba conspired that Solomon would become king. Bath-sheba reported to King David Adonijah's brash activities (Adonijah had already claimed the crown, and was offering sacrifices publicly) and petitioned that Solomon be made king. Nathan then made the same report to the old ruler. David agreed with them that Solomon should be king. So Nathan and Bath-sheba, with the help of Zadok, Benaiah, and David's own personal troops, arranged an extravaganza, placed Solomon on the throne, and proclaimed him king.

When Adonijah realized he no longer had any support, he sought refuge in the Tabernacle. Solomon's aides pulled him out and brought him before King Solomon, who sent him home.

The old king advised his son, Solomon:

"Keep the statutes of Moses. If you and your children follow them, one of your descendants shall always be the Israelite king.

"Do you recall that Joab, my former general, assassinated Abner and Amasa. You should deal with him for this. But be kind to the sons of Barzillai.

"Remember Shime-i, who cursed me when I was chased from Jerusalem. You are not bound by my oath that I wouldn't kill him, and I expect you to act accordingly."

To strengthen his position on the throne, King Solomon sent Benaiah to kill his brother, Adonijah, and displaced Abiathar as priest (this fulfilled Jehovah's decree that the children of Eli, the Levites, would surrender the priesthood).

On Solomon's orders, Benaiah slew Joab as Joab clung to the horns of the altar in the Tabernacle.

Benaiah became Solomon's army commander. Zadok was promoted to priest.

After a short time, upon Solomon's command, Benaiah executed Shime-i.

Jehovah promised Solomon a long life, with riches, fame, honor, and wisdom. After the kingdom was consolidated, Solomon made a treaty with Egypt, marrying one of the Pharaoh's daughters.

Once, two young whores sought his help:

Both women claimed the same child. They told the king that there was born to each of them a child, but that one of the children had died. Each woman claimed the survivor. Solomon solemnly announced a ruling.

"The surviving baby shall be cut in two halves, one-half to each woman," he decreed.

The real mother protested. "Let the infant live," she cried, "the woman may have it." King Solomon knew, then, who was the actual mother of the child, and the child was so awarded.

4: Solomon organized his court: a high priest, scribes, record keeper, army commanders, two assistant priests and their assistants, his own personal priest and adviser, a palace superintendent, and a public projects co-ordinator. He appointed twelve officers to tax the twelve tribes for food and provisions for the kingdom's daily needs. The conquered peoples paid tribute. So the kingdom (Judah and Israel) ruled by Solomon, from the Great River to Egypt and the Philistine borders, was wealthy and at peace throughout his lifetime.

Solomon wrote thousands of proverbs and songs, was of scientific mind and an avid horseman who owned thousands of horses and chariots. He decided to build a Temple to the Lord.

Solomon purchased from King Hiram of Tyre on the Phoenician coast large quantities of cedar and fir which was floated along the Mediterranean southward, and then, at a point west of Jerusalem, carried inland to the city. Thousands of men were sent to Lebanon to assist in this work; several thousand additional laborers and skilled workers were employed to cut, shape, and install huge blocks of stone, and erect the timbers.

For seven years the work progressed without interruption. Finally, the magnificent Temple for Jehovah, ninety feet long, thirty feet wide, and forty-five feet high, was finished.

During the construction of the Temple, Jehovah reassured

Solomon: "If you obey Me and follow My statutes, I will keep the bargain I made with your father, David; that is, the people of Israel will be My people and I will live among them forever."

Much decorative work was done to the stones, cedar and fir in Jehovah's new home. Its basic plan was about the same as the plan for past temples, with a porch entrance, the Holy Place, and the Most Holy Place where the Ark of the Covenant was to rest. But figures of angels, palm trees and flowers were carved thereon, overlaid with gold, silver and brass, and utensils made of gold, silver and brass were placed inside.

7: After he had completed the Lord's Temple, Solomon spent thirteen more years building a palace for himself. It was one hundred fifty feet by seventy-five feet by forty-five feet high, built of cedar, fir and stone, lavishly decorated with images and overlaid with silver and gold.

In front of the Temple, there was constructed a brass basin, forty-five feet across and seven and one-half feet high, supported by twelve sculptured oxen images. The men then constructed ten brass lavers, each six feet square, and placed them on ten portable stands, six feet square, four and one-half feet high. They were decorated with oxen, angels, lions, trees, etc. The utensils and the furniture used in the Temple were of solid gold, including pots, shovels, basins, tanks, and lampstands.

Much of the wealth (mostly silver and gold) that had been accumulated by King David and King Solomon was then stored in the Temple. The Ark containing the two stone tablets was placed in the Most Holy Place. A bright Cloud filled the Temple.

King Solomon spoke to the people:

"We have built a Temple for Jehovah. He will keep the promise He made to us and to my father, David. Would He really live on earth? Please, God, protect this house. Abide herein, as You have promised. When I, or any one of the people of Israel, face toward this Temple and pray, please answer my or their request. When the people are defeated by war, or when they need rain, or relief from famine, or plague, and set their face toward this Temple and pray, hear them and forgive them. If Your people should sin against You and You abandon them to their enemies who carry them to foreign lands — if they then, realizing their error, repent and face this Temple in this City of Jerusalem, hear their prayers, O Lord."

Thousands of offerings of goats, sheep, flour, and oil were made to the Lord that day.

Afterwards, God came to Solomon again. He told Solomon directly: "I, the Lord, intend keeping My promise which I made to David that the descendants of David would be upon the throne of Israel forever. Still, if you, Solomon, or your people, begin to worship other gods and forget Me, I will evict you from this land

and abandon this Temple.”

Solomon began rebuilding other cities such as Gezer, Megiddo, and Hazor, and the shipyard at Ezion-geber. King Hiram sent trained seamen for Solomon’s ships and this brought much trade and more wealth to Solomon’s kingdom.

The Queen of Sheba came to visit, was impressed, and gave Solomon \$4,800,000 in gold. By that time, Solomon was receiving about \$25,000,000 in gold from regular revenues in addition to his taxes and profits. He stored much of it in his palace. He owned an ivory throne overlaid with pure gold. Twelve lion images decorated the six steps which led up to the throne. His cups and dinnerware were solid gold. Trade with foreign lands brought him gold, silver, ivory, apes, peacocks, silverware, dishes, cloth, incense, garments, spices, horses, and mules.

11: Solomon had accumulated seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines, and many of them were women from other nations (Moab, Ammon, Edom, Zidon, etc.). These wives were idol worshippers, and it was not long before Solomon was worshipping their idols with them. He worshipped Ashtoreth, and Milcom, and even built altars on the hills overlooking Jerusalem for Chemosh (Moabite god) and Molech (Ammonite god).

A jealous and annoyed Jehovah denounced Solomon. “Since you have misbehaved,” said He, “I, Jehovah, am taking the kingdom away from the family line of David. After your death, I will deprive your descendants of the kingdom, except for one tribe.”

(During David’s reign, King David and Joab led their Israeli army into Edom, spending six months there killing the male population of that land. They were very successful, but a child named Hadad was secreted to Egypt by some of the officials and there given sanctuary. Now Hadad was grown and had acquired a following and an army. He returned to Edom and was now a threat to Solomon.)

(There were other threats to Solomon’s peace: Rezon, the bandit leader, was in Damascus; Jeroboam, the Ephraite, who had been promised leadership of ten of the tribes of Israel by Ahijah, the prophet, was waiting in Egypt for an opportunity to return.)

When Solomon died, he was succeeded by his son, Rehoboam. At the outset, Rehoboam refused the people’s request that labor draft requirements be eased. The people rebelled against him. All of the tribes except Judah turned from him.

Thus, the kingdom was divided (ten tribes of Israel against Judah and Benjamin) and the ten tribes of Israel from that day forward have been in rebellion against the descendants of King David.

The people of the ten tribes of Israel selected Jeroboam as their

king. King Rehoboam, son of Solomon and grandson of David, continued to be the King of Judah (Judah and the tribe of Benjamin were considered as one).

Jeroboam chose Shechem, in Ephraim, as his headquarters. He caused two gold calf idols to be made (symbols, he said, of the gods which delivered them from Egypt), placing one in Bethel and the other in Dan, as places of worship for the people. He selected priests from the masses (choosing even those who were not Levites).

Jeroboam, standing at the altar of the golden calf idol at Bethel, was about to worship when a prophet approached him, saying: "Josiah, a future descendant of David, shall sacrifice upon this altar the priests who burn incense here. This altar will now break open, spilling out ashes."

King Jeroboam yelled to his aides: "Seize that man," and pointed at the prophet. To the King's horror, his arm became frozen, immobilized, and began to wither. The altar split and ashes poured out. Jeroboam begged the prophet for help.

The prophet prayed — the king's arm was restored. Gratefully, Jeroboam invited the prophet to dine with him at the palace, promising a reward. The prophet declined, explaining that he was under instruction from Jehovah not to eat or drink at Bethel.

But as the prophet departed to return home by a way different from whence he had come, as the Lord had commanded, he was approached by an old man who lyingly declared that the Lord had ordered him to wine and dine the prophet. It wasn't until the foreteller had finished his meal that the old man disclosed God's decree that because of the prophet's disobedience in drinking and eating there, God would not now permit him to be buried in the grave of his father.

The prophet departed, but had traveled only a short distance when he was attacked and killed by a lion. The old man retrieved his body and buried him in his (the old man's) grave.

14: Jeroboam's experience with the prophet did not deter him in his worship of the calf. He appointed priests from the lower castes (an abominable sin), and many sacrifices to idols were made in the hills.

Ahijah, Jehovah's prophet, predicted to Jeroboam's wife that their ill son would die, and he did. He prophesied that the rule of Israel (ten tribes) by the descendants of Jeroboam would someday end. "The Lord God of Israel has spoken," he said. "He promises you and your family miseries and death."

Rehoboam, son of Solomon by an Ammonite woman, was King of Judah for seventeen years. During that time, the people of Judah continually annoyed Jehovah by their worship of idols, construction of shrines outside the Holy City, practice of homosexuality, and other sinful activities.

Taking advantage of the constant civil war which existed between Judah and the ten tribes (the Northern Kingdom), King Shishak of Egypt invaded Palestine, conquered Jerusalem, and pillaged the Temple, taking all the treasures, including Solomon's gold shields. An account of Rehoboam's reign is written in "The Chronicles of the Kings of Judah".

Abijam, son of Rehoboam, succeeded his father as King of Judah. The civil war between the Northern Kingdom and his continued during his reign. The full Abijam account is written in "The Chronicles of the Kings of Judah".

Asa, son of Abijam, became king. He continued the fight against the Israelites, and on one occasion, purchased (with the last gold and silver left in the kingdom) the assistance of the Syrians. With their help, he was able to conquer several Israelite towns. He used the stone and timber from one of the vanquished cities to rebuild Geba. The account of Asa is recorded in "The Chronicles of the Kings of Judah".

In the Northern Kingdom, Nadab succeeded his father Jeroboam, but within the household staff he had inherited, there were treasonable men. The Lord had told Jeroboam, through the prophet, Ahijah, that He would destroy his descendants. Nadab had ruled only two years when Baasha, son of Ahijah, assassinated him and murdered all of his family, thus fulfilling the prophesy. Baasha was an evil king, leading his Israelites in idol worship, as duly recorded in "The Chronicles of the Kings of Israel". The prophet, Jehu, declared that the family of Basha would be eaten by dogs and vultures.

Baasha's son, Elah, ruled Israel as king only two years before he and his family were assassinated in their palace by his cavalry captain, Zimri. Zimri made a clean sweep, murdering even Elah's male kinsmen, neighbors or friends.

Within seven days, however, Zimri's troops were overcome by General Omri's army at Tirzah. When Zimri saw that his forces were defeated, he set fire to the palace and died in it as it burned.

Omri's army then turned its attention to Tibni, another claimant to the Israelite throne, and defeated him; thus, Omri, also an idol worshipper, became king. During his reign, he built the City of Samaria. All these events are recorded in "The Chronicles of the Kings of Israel".

The son of Omri was Ahab, and Ahab, with his wife, Jezebel, ruled the ten tribes of Israel for twenty-two years. Jezebel, from Phoenicia, was a Baal worshipper. She and her husband, Ahab, built Baal temples and altars in Samaria and led the people in the worship of that god.

Elijah, with long, thick hair, wearing a camel-hair coat over his hairy body, came to Ahab and predicted no further rain for the land of Israel until he, Elijah, permitted it.

Then Elijah hid at Cherith Brook, where he was fed by ravens sent there by Jehovah. God sent him to the home of a widow in Zarephath. Although she had little to eat (a small pan of oil and a handful of meal), she, her son, and Elijah ate from the meager supply for a long time (there was always some left). When the widow's son died, Elijah placed himself on the body of the child three times and asked the Lord to return life to the child. The Lord complied. When the child had been resurrected, Elijah returned him to his mother.

After three years of drought, the Lord informed Elijah that the drought would soon be ended, and Elijah sought out King Ahab to tell him. He requested Ahab to assemble the people of Israel, the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal, and the four hundred grove prophets at Mount Carmel for a test to determine who was the true God (Baal or Jehovah).

When everyone had gathered at the site selected, Elijah proposed that the prophets of Baal cut up a young bull and place it upon the wood of their altar and that he would do likewise with regard to his altar. "Then," said he, "the god who answers by sending fire for the sacrifice is the true God."

Everyone agreed.

The prophets of Baal danced, shouted and cut themselves with knives, but could not get the wood to start burning. Elijah mocked them.

Then Elijah dug a trench around his altar and poured twelve barrels of water over the sacrifice, the liquid running over and off the altar into and filling the trench. He prayed for proof that the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel was the true God and that he was the true prophet. Heaven's flames sprang up around the altar, completely burning the bull, the wood, the stones and even the water itself.

The people seized the four hundred and fifty prophets of Baal and delivered them to Elijah; Elijah murdered each and every one of them there at Kishon Brook.

Then the rains came, and Elijah victoriously ran ahead of Ahab's chariot as Ahab returned to Jezreel.

19: Queen Jezebel was not impressed with Elijah's demonstration at Mount Carmel. For his slaughter of her prophets, she vowed to kill him before the day was ended.

Elijah heard and fled, and in the wilderness he sat under a Juniper tree and prayed for death. However, an angel attended him giving him food and drink. Thus strengthened, he secluded himself for forty days and forty nights in a cave on Mount Horeb. During that time, he was visited by Jehovah.

God demonstrated to Elijah that he would no longer find Him in the windstorms, the earthquakes, or the fire, then spoke to him softly. "Return to Damascus," He said, "and there anoint Hazael

king of Syria, Jehu king of Israel, and Elisha prophet."

Elisha was plowing when Elijah found him. He stopped, ceremoniously sacrificed his oxen, and left with Elijah.

Meanwhile, a Syrian army, headed by King Ben-hadad, invaded Israel and besieged Samaria. Twice King Ahab's forces defeated them, and even captured Ben-hadad, himself. Ahab spared the life of the Syrian king (Ben-hadad promised restitution), and started home.

Down the road from Ahab, one of Jehovah's prophets asked a man to smite him and when the man refused, the seer predicted his death. About that time, a lion killed the man. The prophet then asked another man to wound him and the man did; the prophet covered his face with ashes and waited for King Ahab to pass. When Ahab drew near, the prophet removed the ashes and declared: "Since you, Ahab, have spared the life of Ben-hadad, contrary to Jehovah's order to slay him, you, yourself, must die in his place."

Later, in Jezreel, Ahab desired the garden of Naboth, a neighbor, who refused to sell. Ahab's wife, Jezebel, conspired with witnesses who swore falsely that Naboth cursed Jehovah and the king. Naboth was stoned by the citizens and Ahab took charge of the garden.

Because of the sins Ahab had committed, Jehovah decreed the death of Ahab's male heirs. He sent Elijah to inform the king: "Those of your family who die in the city will be eaten by dogs and those who die in the country shall be food for the vultures."

Ahab tore his clothing, wore sackcloth, fasted, and mourned. Yahweh told Elijah that since Ahab had demonstrated his repentance, He would not inflict upon Ahab the punishment that He had promised, but that, instead, He would hold that for Ahab's sons.

22: In Judah, when Asa died, his son, Jehoshaphat, became king. During his reign, he and King Ahab of Israel made an alliance, under which they agreed to make war upon the Syrians who still ruled the Israelite city of Ramoth-gilead.

All of the oracles, except Micaiah who alone represented Jehovah, predicted that the kings would be successful in their attack upon Syria. Ahab assured Jehoshaphat that Micaiah never did predict anything good anyway and that they should proceed with their plans of battle. So they did.

Ahab entered the fray in disguise, but was killed by a stray arrow from the ranks of his own archers. In town, when his chariot was washed, dogs licked the dead king's blood, fulfilling God's prophesy.

Jehoshaphat continued to reign in Judah, while Ahaziah, son of Ahab, became the king of Israel. Jehoshaphat destroyed some of the idol shrines, prosecuted homosexuals, and attempted to re-

open trade during his reign. When he died, he was succeeded by his son, Jehoram. The acts and deeds of these vile kings, who engaged in idol worship, are set out in "The Chronicles of the Kings of Israel" and "The Chronicles of the Kings of Judah".

II KINGS

Comment

After Solomon:

The Kings of the Northern Kingdom (ten tribes of Israel, with Samaria [Shechem] as capital) were: Jereboam 933 B.C., Nadab 911, Baasha 910, Elah 887, Zimri 886, Omri 886, Ahab 875, Ahaziah 855, Joram 854, Jehu 843, Jehoahaz 820, Joash 806, Jereboam II 790, Zechariah 748, Shallum 748, Menahem, 748, Pekahiah 738, Pekah 748, and Hoshea 730 (B.C.)

After its capture and disembodiment by the Assyrians the Northern Kingdom was never restored. The history of the Ten Tribes was ended.

The Kings of Judah and Benjamin, comprising the tiny Southern Kingdom, were: Rehoboam, 933 B.C., Abijah 915, Asa 912, Jehoshaphat 874, Jehoram 850, Ahaziah 843, Athaliah 843, Joash 843, Amaziah 803, Uzziah 787, Jotham 749, Ahaz 741, Hezekiah 726, Manasseh 697, Amon 641, Josiah 639, Jehoahaz 608, Jehoiakim 608, Jehoiachin 597, Zedekiah 597-586 (B.C.)

In 597 B.C., most of Judah's Jews were deported to Babylon. Seventy years later, some of the families and clans of the Southern Kingdom were returned to Jerusalem, and through them, the history of the race and religion has been perpetuated.

* * * * *

1: Ahaziah, son of Ahab, was accidentally injured when he fell from an upper floor of his palace. An angel of God, through Elijah, informed the king that because he had asked questions of Baal-zebub (Ekron god), that he, Ahaziah, would not recover, but would die in bed. This prophecy made the king angry and he sent fifty soldiers and their captain to arrest Elijah. Elijah destroyed them all by commanding fire from Heaven to consume them. The king sent fifty more men, with the same result. The king sent fifty more men, but this time their leader asked: "Please, Elijah, have mercy." Elijah, after prompting by the Lord, agreed to go with the messengers to see the king.

And there, in the king's presence, Elijah repeated his declaration that the king would die. Ahaziah died, as Elijah had prophesied, and was succeeded by Jehoram (for Ahaziah was without male issue). Thus, Israel and Judah were ruled for a time by one king, Jehoram, as recorded in "The Chronicles of the Kings of Israel".

As Elijah and Elisha were traveling along, ministerial students from Bethel and Jericho informed them that God was going to take Elijah. Elijah and Elisha arrived at the banks of the Jordan.

Elijah gripped the corner of his coat, slapped the garment against the water, and the waters parted. Elijah and Elisha crossed the river on dry ground.

Then, as they proceeded, horses of fire, pulling a chariot of fire, came between them. A whirlwind carried Elijah into Heaven. Elisha saw it.

Elisha, returning, took Elijah's coat and lay it upon the waters of the Jordan. Again, the stream divided and Elisha traversed the now dry river bottom. The young prophets of Jericho were witnesses to these events.

As Elisha passed through Jericho, the officials there asked him for help with the water from their wells, complaining that the waters from the wells were unfruitful. Elisha threw salt in the water and declared that the evils of the water were healed, and it was.

As Elisha continued on toward Bethel, many young children followed him, mocking him and teasing him about his bald head. Elisha, calling upon the Lord, placed a curse upon them in His name. Immediately two bears came from the forest and killed forty-two of them. Elisha maintained his pace through Samaria.

3: Later Elisha accompanied the army of King Jehoram of Israel and King Jehoshaphat of Judah in their joint venture against the Moabites. (Moab had refused to pay any more taxes to Israel.) As the armies were moving through the wilderness toward the land of Moab, they ran out of water, and they called upon Elisha.

Elisha requested a minstrel. While the music played, the Lord spoke to Elisha, thus: "Dig ditches in the valley and they shall be filled with water. Do not worry, you will conquer Moab."

The next morning, water filled the valley, and this not only gave drink to the Israelite and Judah armies, but it made it appear to the spies of Moab as they looked across the valley that the camped troops had fought among themselves. The Moabites hurried toward the valley, seeking loot, thus unexpectedly meeting the full force of the joint armies. Overwhelming the surprised defenders, the invaders swept through the land of Moab, slaying the Moabites, chopping down the trees, stopping up the wells, and cluttering the good land with stones.

The King of Moab rallied seven hundred of his swordsmen to face the aggressors' charge, and while the Israeli armies lay poised to attack him, he brought forth his oldest son and sacrificed him as a burnt offering upon the wall in full view of all the combatants. Israel's soldiers recoiled from the nauseous spectacle — their army withdrew.

Once, a widow sought Elisha's help with regard to the payment of her debts. Her sole possession was a small pot of oil. Elisha told her: "Gather all the pots and pans you can accumulate from friends, neighbors, and others, take them into your home, and pour oil from your single jar into the vessels." This she did, and to

her amazement and happiness, her single, small jar filled every utensil which she had collected. She had sufficient oil with which to pay her debts and enough left over for the care of herself and her sons.

Another day, Elisha visited Shunem, occupying a small room which had been provided for his convenience by a certain woman of the city. In gratitude for these amenities, Elisha decreed that this woman, who had never had a son, would have a son within a year. The woman conceived and had a baby boy.

A few years later, the woman's boy died, and she saddled her donkey and set out to fetch Elisha from Mount Carmel.

Elisha met her there, and when he learned of her trouble, he and his assistant, Gehazi, hurried toward her home. Gehazi arrived at the home first and placed Elisha's staff across the child's face, but the child did not respond.

Elisha went into the boy's bedroom, prayed to the Lord, and placed himself across the child, mouth to mouth, eyes to eyes, and hands to hands. In a little while, the boy sneezed seven times and was resurrected. Elisha handed the boy, whom he had brought back from the dead, to his mother.

Shortly thereafter, Elisha was in Gilgal during the midst of a famine when some of his students complained that their evening meal was poisoned by some wild plants they had gathered and cooked. Elisha threw meal into the pot and told his students to proceed. They ate and were unharmed.

Once, Elisha fed one hundred young prophets from a few ears of corn and twenty loaves of barley bread and there was more than enough for all.

Elisha's fame had spread to Syria. Naaman, general over all the Syrian armies, sought Elisha's help to cure him of his leprosy. Elisha, through a servant, told Naaman: "Go wash in the Jordan River seven times." The general was disappointed in such advice and at first refused, but he was persuaded by his assistants to comply with the prophet's instructions. And, when Naaman had dipped himself seven times in the Jordan River, he was healed — his flesh was new and clean. A happy Naaman returned to Elisha's home, offered and urged Elisha to accept gifts, which Elisha declined, and swore allegiance to Elisha's God.

After Naaman left, Gehazi chased after him, overtook him and reported that Elisha could now accept some of the gifts. Gehazi received two suits of clothes and \$5,000.00 in silver.

When he returned to Elisha, he concealed the gifts, but Elisha knew what he had done. Elisha cursed him, decreeing leprosy upon Gehazi and his descendants forever. Instantly, there appeared upon the countenance and body of Gehazi the dreaded whiteness of the creeping death.

6: Once, Elisha's students were cutting trees in the forest when

an ax-head slipped off its handle and fell into the Jordan River. They reported this to Elisha; Elisha tossed a stick into the water, and the iron ax-head surfaced. While it was floating there, a student retrieved it.

On several occasions, Elisha warned the Israelite king of the location of Syrian forces and the Israel troops thereby avoided serious losses and defeats.

When the Syrian king learned of Elisha's aid to the king of Israel, he sent an army to surround the city where Elisha lived. Elisha prayed to Jehovah that He would make the Syrians blind, and He blinded them. Elisha then led the helpless Syrians into Samaria, where they were fed by the Israel king and released.

Later, though, King Ben-hadad of Syria besieged Samaria. The siege lasted so long that the people began to starve. A donkey's head sold for \$80.00 — a pint of dove's dung sold at \$5.00 — women ate their children.

The Israeli king was deeply troubled; he tore his clothes and swore that he would kill Elisha. Then Elisha predicted the end of the siege. That evening, four lepers, desiring to surrender, went out to the Syrian encampment. The Syrians had abandoned their camp (the night before the Lord had caused the soldiers of the Syrian army to hear chariots, horses and other sounds indicating arrival of Jewish reinforcements. So they had fled.) The siege was ended, as Elisha predicted.

Elisha advised one woman to move to another community to avoid a seven year famine. Seven years later she returned, entering just as Gehazi, speaking to the king, was narrating the story of the resurrection of the woman's boy through Elisha. She verified the story was true. The king restored her lands and other valuables.

Elisha visited King Ben-hadad of Syria during the king's illness. He talked to the king's servant, Hazael. He predicted that Ben-hadad would recover (knowing that he would die), but that Hazael would attack the people of Israel, burn their forts, slaughter their soldiers, bash in their babies' heads, and rip open their pregnant women. The next day, Hazael smothered King Ben-hadad with a thick water-soaked cloth, and claimed the throne.

During Jehoram's (son of King Jehoshaphat of Judah) reign, the people of Edom and Libnah successfully rebelled. They paid no further tribute.

Then Ahaziah became king of Judah during the time King Joram, son of Ahab, was king of Israel. They joined their forces in a war against Hazael, king of Syria, at Ramoth-gilead.

While Ahaziah and Joram were resting at Jezreel from this battle, Elisha instructed one of his student prophets to find Jehu and anoint him King of Israel. The young prophet found Jehu

and anointed him. Following the ceremony, Jehu rebelled against Joram. He, himself, jumped in his chariot and rushed to Jezreel. King Ahaziah and King Joram, seeing the approach of their friend, Jehu, went out in the field to meet him.

When Joram realized that the onrushing Jehu was a traitor, he turned to escape, but Jehu's arrow struck him down. King Ahaziah also fled, but Jehu's pursuing forces overtook him at Megiddo and slew him.

Upon Jehu's return to Jezreel, there was Jezebel, with painted eyelids and hair ornamentally dressed, waiting for him at an upper window of the palace. She defied him.

"Murderer," she accused.

Jehu bellowed commands to the palace eunuchs to throw Jezebel from the window. They threw her out, and the horses trampled her bloody body.

After he had eaten, Jehu instructed his aids to bury Jezebel, but when they searched for her body, they found only her skull, her feet and the palms of her hands. So it came to pass that the Lord's prophesy, through Elijah, that "dogs would eat the flesh of Jezebel" was fulfilled.

Jehu demanded of the Samaria elders that they slay the seventy sons of King Ahab; in fear, they complied with his order, sending the heads to Jehu at Jezreel. Jehu explained to them that neither he nor they, but only God, was responsible for the deaths of Ahab's sons. "The Lord told us, through Elijah," said he, "that death would come to Ahab's descendants. What has happened is only a fulfillment of the Lord's decree."

Jehu then murdered all the relatives of Ahab, including distant relatives, friends and staff. He slew the forty-two brothers of King Ahaziah. In Samaria, he called a meeting of the Baal worshippers, as if to lead them in worship, and when they had gathered in the temple, he commanded his guards to enter and execute them. Jehu destroyed the Baal temple, but not the golden calves at Bethel and Dan.

Jehovah was pleased. He promised Jehu that, as a reward to him for his extermination of the Ahab family and associates, He would make Jehu's descendants "even unto four generations" Israelite kings.

During Jehu's reign, he lost to Syria (King Hazael), Gilead, Gad and Reuben, much of Manasseh, and other parts of the northeast section of Israel. He was succeeded by his son, Jehoahaz.

11: In Judah, meanwhile, Athaliah, mother of King Ahaziah, upon receiving news of the death of her son, promptly claimed the throne of Judah, killing all of Ahaziah's children to secure it. The infant, Joash, Ahaziah's youngest son, was hidden by his aunt, and thus escaped. When Joash was about eight years old,

Jehoiada the priest, together with other conspirators, crowned Joash king and assassinated Athaliah. Johoiada then pledged his people to the Lord, and led them in the destruction of the Baal temples. But they did not destroy the forbidden altars in the hills, and the people still used them.

Joash reigned forty years. During this time his priests received gifts at the Temple door for the reconstruction of the Temple which had theretofore deteriorated. But he was not able to use the contributions for Temple repair. In the latter part of his reign, King Hazael, of Syria, threatened Jerusalem, and Joash sent Hazael all the gold and wealth in the palace and the Temple. Hazael, thus appeased, withdrew his forces.

Joash was slain by the members of his staff and succeeded by his son, Amaziah, as duly recorded in "The Chronicles of the Kings of Judah".

In Israel, Jehoahaz (son of Jehu) and his people were leading wicked lives, and the Lord punished them constantly by causing the Syrians, led by King Hazael, to attack and rule them.

Joash, son of Jehoahaz, succeeded his father and reigned at the same time in Samaria as King Joash, son of Ahaziah, reigned in Judah. Joash of Israel lived sinfully. The account of his reign, together with a record of his battles against King Amaziah of Judah, are set forth in "The Chronicles of the Kings of Israel".

Before Joash died, he visited Elisha, who was ill. Elisha instructed Joash to bring his bow and arrows. The king, at Elisha's command and assistance, shot an arrow through an open window and Elisha declared that the arrow was a sign of his victory over the Syrians at Aphek. Elisha then commanded the king to take the remaining arrows and strike them against the ground.

The king struck the ground three times. Elisha was angered. "Why didn't you strike them five or six times," he told the king, "for if you had, you would have beaten Syria several times until you had humbled it, but now you will win only three contests."

Elisha died.

Shortly thereafter, some Israelites were about to bury one of their dead near the tomb of Elisha when the funeral was interrupted by the approach of Moabite bandits. In preparing to flee, they hurriedly set the deceased into the first tomb available, which was Elisha's. When the body of decedent touched the bones of Elisha, the man was resurrected. He leaped up and scampered away.

Joash, of Israel, recaptured three cities that had been held by the Syrians.

When Amaziah became king in Judah, he ordered the execution of the men who had assassinated his father, but not their children (for God had decreed through Moses' law that children should not

be killed for the sins of their fathers).

Amaziah was successful in a campaign against the Edomites, and confidently challenged the forces of King Joash of Israel. Reluctantly, King Joash of Israel committed his troops to the fight which Amaziah insisted upon. Amaziah was badly beaten. Joash's men broke down the wall of Jerusalem, pillaged the Temple and the treasury, selected several hostages, and returned to Samaria.

When Joash died, he was succeeded by Jereboam, his son. Amaziah, of Judah, was slain by traitors, and was succeeded by his son, Azariah (Uzziah).

In Israel, Jereboam worshipped idols (just like a predecessor, Jeroboam, son of Nebat), but recovered some of the lands Israel had surrendered to Syria. He was succeeded by his son, Zachariah.

Azariah ruled Judah for fifty-two years. For the most part, he followed the Lord. But he didn't remove the shrines in the hills and Jehovah made a leper of him. When he died, as written in "The Chronicles of the Kings of Judah", his son, Jotham, became king.

Zachariah of Israel also worshipped idols. He was assassinated by Shallum, who then became king. (Thus, Jehovah's promise to Jehu was fulfilled; that is, that his lineal male heirs to the fourth generation would be Israelite kings.)

Shallum reigned for one month and was assassinated by Menahem, who ruled for the next ten years. Menahem worshipped idols, along with his people, and when Israel (Northern Kingdom) was threatened by King Pul of Assyria, Menahem appeased him with a gift of two million dollars. He raised the money from the rich. Menahem was succeeded by his son, Pekahiah.

Pekahiah, an idol worshipper, was assassinated by his army general, Pekah, who ruled Samaria for twenty years. During Pekah's reign, the Assyrians invaded Israel, taking many of the major cities, and deporting many thousands of the captured Israelites to Assyria. Israel fought Judah, also. Pekah, the assassinator, was himself assassinated by Hoshea.

Jotham was king of Judah when Hoshea became king of Israel. He failed to remove the hill shrines (where worship of Jehovah was done, away from the Temple site, contrary to Moses' law). His son, Ahaz, inherited his throne.

16: Ahaz, descendant of David, was wicked. As king, he offered sacrifices at the shrines and altars in the hills; he killed his son and offered him as a burnt offering.

An alliance between Syria and Israel brought a hostile army to the doors of Jerusalem. King Ahaz sought help from King Tiglath-pileser of Assyria, sending the silver and gold from the Temple and palace in hope of securing assistance. The Assyrians

responded, attacked Damascus, Syrian capital, and took it. While King Ahaz was there visiting the Assyrian king, he saw an altar.

He sent instructions to Uriah the priest in Jerusalem to build one like it. Obeying the king's commands, Uriah removed the old bronze altar and replaced it with the new altar. The new altar (much like a heathen altar) was used for burnt offerings, meat offerings, and drink offerings from the people. In addition, Uriah took apart the basement borders, and removed the lavers and the large pool from above the bronze oxen and placed them on the stone pavement.

Hezekiah, son of Ahaz, became king upon the death of Ahaz.

The acts of these kings are written in "The Chronicles of the Kings of Judah".

The Israelites, under King Hoshea, had been defeated and subjected by the king of Assyria, paying expensive tribute to that nation. When Hoshea sought Egypt's help, King Shalmaneser of Assyria imprisoned him. Assyrian troops covered all of Israel. Gradually, during King Hoshea's reign, the people of Israel were deported to Assyria where they were placed in colonies along the Habor River, in Gozan, and in the Medes cities.

The downfall of Israel came about because the people worshipped gods other than Jehovah. God had warned them many times through prophets and signs, but the people of Israel were stubborn and would not heed. They worshipped idols and possessed symbols and altars. They held rites to Jehovah in the fields, mountains, and woods. There, also, they burned incense to other gods. They used enchantments, and luck charms, and called up the spirits.

And so the Lord, very angry, allowed the ten tribes of Israel to be conquered and then deported until, finally, there was no longer any nation of Israel.

Now, only Judah remained in the Promised Land.

The Assyrians transported some of their peoples into the now empty cities of Samaria. At first, the new settlers, from Cuthah, Ava, Hamath, etc., were harassed by lions sent by the Lord to kill and terrify them. So the Assyrian king ordered one of the deported priests to return to Bethel to teach the new colonists the ways of Yahweh, the God of Israel. Still, the new peoples also worshipped idols and their own gods, Succoth-benoth, Nergal, Ashima, Nibhaz, and Tartak. The settlers also worshipped Jehovah.

While Israel was being erased by the Assyrians, King Hezekiah of Judah was stamping out idol worship throughout his domain. He removed the hill shrines, and broke up and took down the bronze serpent that Moses had made. Judah prospered. They drove the Philistines from many of their cities. Then they rebelled against Assyria and refused to serve it.

King Sennacherib met this resistance by smashing several of Judah's walled cities. Then King Hezekiah apologized and offered money and services. By appropriation of the Temple treasures, including the Temple's gold overlay, he was able to raise \$1,500,000 for the Assyrian king.

Notwithstanding Hezekiah's apology and tribute, King Sennacherib sent one of his divisions, commanded by a general, to besiege Jerusalem. The general, standing just outside the city, called to the Judah defenders manning the walls. "Surrender," he demanded, "you will receive no help from Egypt or your gods.

"Your God did not save Samaria," He thundered. "How, then, can He save Jerusalem?"

Hezekiah and his aides tore their clothes, put on sackcloth and prayed, prostrate, in the Temple. Isaiah, the prophet, declared that the Assyrian king would hear a false report, start home and be killed on the way. The Assyrian general received notice that Assyria was about to be attacked by Ethiopian troops; he withdrew his army from Jerusalem, leaving the message that they would soon return to level Jerusalem.

Hezekiah prayed to the Lord that he and Jerusalem would be saved. The prophet, Isaiah, announced that Jerusalem had no cause to be afraid. "Jehovah has helped the Assyrians conquer other cities," he admitted, "but the Lord will not let them enter Jerusalem, His Holy City."

That night, 185,000 Assyrian soldiers died at the hand of the angel of the Lord, and when King Sennacherib returned to Nineveh, he was assassinated by his sons.

20: At that time, Hezekiah was very ill. Yahweh ordered Isaiah to inform him that he would be well in three days. "Tell him he will live fifteen more years," Yahweh told Isaiah.

Isaiah was admitted to Hezekiah's bedside. He advised the king to place a lump of figs upon the boil. Hezekiah asked Isaiah for proof that God had promised to heal him. Without hesitation, Isaiah cried out to the Lord.

"Prove to this sick king, O Yahweh, that I am your messenger. Move the shadow on the sun dial backward ten degrees." The shadow on the dial moved backwards ten degrees. In three days, as the Lord had predicted, Hezekiah was cured of the boil.

Shortly afterwards, visitors from Babylon were shown through the palace by Hezekiah. Isaiah rebuked him for his exhibit of the palace treasures, prophesying that the treasures would some day be carried to Babylon. The remainder of Hezekiah's acts are reflected in "The Chronicles of the Kings of Judah". His son, Manasseh, succeeded him.

King Manasseh of Judah rebuilt the Baal altars, the shrines in the hills and the grove idols; he placed heathen images and altars in Jehovah's Temple. He burned one of his sons as a sacrifice. He

led the people in astrology superstition, used enchantments, and dealt with familiar spirits and wizards.

Yahweh promised, through the prophets, that He would bring calamities upon Jerusalem and Judah, and surrender them to their enemies.

Manasseh ruled fifty-five years, and when he died, his son, Amon, ruled Judah in the ways his father had set for an additional two years. The assassins who killed him were themselves executed by the citizens. Josiah, Amon's son, reigned for the next thirty-one years.

Josiah directed the repair of the Temple. During this work, a scroll containing the Laws of Moses was found by the High Priest. The priests held a conference. Huldah, a prophetess, reported that Jehovah had told her that He was going to destroy the city alright, fulfilling the text of the scrolls which had been found by the High Priest. But, she said, Yahweh had promised that since the people had humbled themselves, repented, torn their clothing and wept, He would postpone the destruction of their nation for a generation or two.

23: Josiah assembled the people of Judah and read to them all of God's laws as stated in the book which the High Priest had found. He instructed the High Priest, his assistants, and door-keepers to destroy all tools and devices which accompany Baal, Ashtoreth, Sun, Moon, and Stars worship. Josiah defrocked the heathen priests. He wrecked the male prostitution houses. He tore out the foreign altars from the Temple and removed the shrines from the hills. He dug bones from the graves at Bethel and burned them on the heathen altar there so that the altar would be polluted.

He proclaimed the keeping of the Passover festival in Jerusalem, and it was a huge success.

But all that Josiah did was not enough to offset the great harm done by King Manasseh and to quiet the anger of the Lord against Judah.

Josiah was killed at Megiddo when he attacked Egyptian forces as they prepared for war with Assyrian troops. He was succeeded by his son, Jehoahaz, who was immediately imprisoned in Riblah by Pharaoh Nechoh of Egypt; then Eliakim, also a son of Josiah, was appointed by King Nechoh to rule Jerusalem. King Nechoh changed Eliakim's name to Jehoiakim. Jehoiakim taxed the people heavily to pay tribute to Egypt.

Later, Jehoiakim surrendered his forces at Jerusalem to King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, then served him three years. The kingdom of Judah, weak and undefended, was easy prey for the bandits of Chaldea, Syria, Moab, and Ammon, who pillaged and robbed the people and the land.

As recorded in "The Chronicles of the Kings of Judah".

Jehoiakim was succeeded by his son, Jehoiachin. In this era, Babylon occupied Judah, Egypt having withdrawn. King Nebuchadnezzar captured Jerusalem, sacked the Temple and palace treasures, and deported 10,000 captives, including the princes, fighting men, craftsmen, and workers to Babylon.

Only the poor and incompetent were left in the land of Judah. Over them, the Babylonian king appointed Mattaniah, uncle of King Jehoiachin, to rule. Nebuchadnezzar changed Mattaniah's name to Zedekiah.

And so it came about that the Lord God Jehovah, in His anger, utterly beat down the people of Jerusalem and Judah.

Later, when King Zedekiah rebelled against Babylon, the Babylonian army besieged Jerusalem for two years. Jerusalem capitulated and Zedekiah was captured. Bound in chains, Zedekiah watched helplessly as his sons were butchered. Then his eyes were gouged and he was carried, still chained, to Babylon.

The principal cities of Judah were burned. The Jerusalem walls were demolished. The guards and the priests were led away to Babylon for execution. The few remaining treasures of the Temple and palace were taken and the buildings were burned.

Gedaliah was named governor over Judah, a land of devastation, populated only by the aged and infirm. Bandit patriots killed Gedaliah, but their rebellion was quickly controlled.

Nearly a half century passed before King Jehoiachin was taken from prison. He was treated kindly by King Evil-merodach. He remained in Babylon the rest of his life.

CHRONICLES

Comment

Time of Events: 1400 to 500 B.C.

In the Hebrew Bible, Chronicles is the last book of the Old Testament. Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah, apparently, were originally one book, which may have been written by various authors at any time between the 2nd and 4th Centuries B.C.

Despite tradition, Ezra, who lived about 450 B.C., was probably not the author. However, it could be argued that the principal source of materials to which the authors of Chronicles referred was material originated by him. The probabilities are that several scribes contributed from time to time.

The Bible is filled with repetitions. To learn the full narrative, the repetitions must be endured. Do not omit Chronicles. Continue reading.

* * * * *

I CHRONICLES

The first nine chapters of I Chronicles report the genealogies of the Jews from Adam, the first man, to the time of the Jews return from captivity (return from Babylon after seventy years in exile). Possibly the reason those returning from captivity set out these genealogies was to apportion the land to particular families; under the Jewish Law (Leviticus) these lands could not be perpetually sold out of the family to whom they had been allotted.

Also, priesthood was hereditary; setting forth the genealogy of Aaron and the Levites was, therefore, essential.

I Chronicles reports that the genealogy of every Israelite was written in the books of the Kings of Israel and Judah.

The reason the people of Judah were exiled to Babylon was because they had sinned. When released by the Persians, some of the families from Judah, including priests of the Levite tribe and their assistants, and peoples from the tribes of Benjamin, Ephraim, and Manasseh, elected to return. More than 4,000 people from these tribes and from various places throughout their place of captivity returned to Jerusalem and their cities in Israel and Judah, and began the task of rebuilding the Temple and organizing their church.

10: Saul and his three sons were killed by the Philistines at Mount Gilboa. The terrified Israelites fled, leaving their villages to the enemy. Saul's defeat and death were caused by his consulting a medium instead of seeking advice from Yahweh. Thus, the kingdom fell to David.

After David was named king of Israel (David was already king of Judah), he captured Zion (Jerusalem - City of David) and repaired and fortified the city. He built a mighty army, 342,000

men and officers, including the Mighty Three and The Thirty Captains, who were mighty warriors, and who killed giants and fought armies single-handedly.

But before David became king, he, with some of his top officers, attempted to join the Philistines in their war against Saul. When the Philistine leaders, fearful of his loyalty, refused him, he and his warriors, including many who deserted from King Saul's forces, operated a successful military campaign against the Amaleks.

One of his first decisions as King was to bring the Ark of God to Jerusalem.

As the Ark was being hauled on a cart driven by two oxen, Uzza, who was driving the oxen, attempted to stabilize the Ark when the oxen faltered, and inadvertently touched it. Yahweh struck him dead.

David, disgusted with Yahweh for His killing of Uzza, halted the procession. He assigned the Ark to Obed-edom, the Gittite, and left it there for three months before permitting it to enter the Holy City.

14: David had numerous wives and many sons, including his wife Bath-sheba, and their son, Solomon. With the help of King Hiram of Tyre, who sent skilled workers, David constructed many public works. He defeated the Philistines on several occasions. He built himself a palace, and finally brought the Ark of God into the Sacred Tent where there was much celebration, playing of harps, sacrifice of animals, and feasting.

David appointed the Levites and the sons of Aaron as priests to minister at the Tabernacle. He proposed to build a new Temple for Yahweh, but Yahweh told him, through the prophet, Nathan: "I have lived in tents from the time I rescued the Israelites from Egypt. I do not particularly want a Temple. I will make your sons and their sons the kings of Israel forever, David, but I do not want you to build the Temple. There is too much blood on you, David. After your death, one of your sons shall build My House." David gave a prayer of thanks and accepted the Lord's promise.

David conquered the land of Moab, defeated the Syrians, and exacted annual tribute from the people of Damascus, capital of Syria; he defeated the Ammonites and the Edomites and was successful everywhere.

21: Against the advice of General Joab and under the influence of Satan, David caused a census to be taken of his people, which reflected that there was 1,100,000 able-bodied men in Israel, and 470,000 in Judah, excluding the tribes of Benjamin and Levi. The taking of the census angered Jehovah and He sent a plague upon Israel in the form of an angel.

The angel had killed 70,000 when David saw it above Jerusalem, standing with sword drawn. Quickly he donned sack-

cloth and ashes and prayed to God that the plague would stop. Jehovah heard and mercifully halted the plague at the place where David had seen the angel standing with the sword, the threshing floor of Ornan (a Jebusite). David built an altar there and sacrificed to the Lord in commemoration of the place where the plague ended.

David chose that same site for the great Temple. He instructed Solomon on the details of the construction; he collected four billion dollars (\$4,000,000,000) in gold, and silver, iron, bronze, timber and stones worth more than three billion dollars as a contribution toward the materials needed. He organized the officials and priests, and assigned the priests particular duties with regard to the operation of the Temple once it was constructed. The Levites and Aaron's descendants were given the Temple ministry. He appointed a choir from the Levites, and musicians, doorkeepers, caretakers, accountants, judges, and other leaders to assist in the worship by the people and their government and rule.

David's army was of twelve parts, 24,000 men to each part, commanded by appointed officers. He chose civilian political leaders. David proclaimed that Jehovah had selected him and his descendants to rule the land of Israel forever. He informed the citizenry that Solomon was given the task of building the Temple, and delivered to Solomon the plans which he had made for this work. He made his own contribution to Temple construction from his own savings, amounting to more than ninety-five million dollars (\$95,000,000) in gold and thirty million dollars (\$30,000,000) in silver.

Israel's government workers, following the example of their leader, contributed more than three hundred million dollars in gold, silver, brass and iron.

Before the people, David sang praises to the Lord. That day, the people sacrificed a thousand bullocks, a thousand rams, and a thousand sheep as burnt offerings, together with drink offerings at the Temple site, feasting and drinking before Jehovah. When David died, Solomon became king. Much of the life of David has been recorded in the "Book of Samuel, the Seer", and the "Book of Nathan, the Prophet", and the "Book of the Prophet, Gad".

II CHRONICLES

1: When Solomon became king, he asked Jehovah for wisdom.

He began building the palace and the Temple in accord with the plans furnished by Jehovah through David. He sought skilled workers and timber from King Hiram of Tyre. The Temple was ninety feet long and thirty feet wide, and the front one hundred eighty feet high. It was made of stone, inlaid with timber, and overlaid with gold. On the west side of the Holy House was a room called the Holy of Holies in which two gold-plated angel images sat above the Ark of the Covenant containing the Ten Commandments tablets. Next to this room was a room called The Holy Place. The Holy Place and the Holy of Holies were divided by a veil. The veil was blue, purple, and crimson linen, embroidered with angel images.

In front of the Temple was a brass altar, thirty feet square and fifteen feet high.

There were built ten wash bowls, and a huge pool, with bottoms and sides of brass six inches thick, having a circumference of forty-five feet, seven and one-half feet high, containing thirty thousand gallons of water, and supported by twelve oxen. The Temple faced East. In the Holy Place the workers placed ten gold candlesticks, five on each side of the pool. When the Temple was complete and the people were celebrating and singing as to the goodness and mercy of God, a bright Cloud (Lord's Glory) filled it.

Solomon prayed to Jehovah: "Hereafter, O Lord, those of us, Your people, who sin, but who repent and face the Temple, praying to You, forgive them." Then fire came from Heaven and consumed the sacrifices. An awed audience fell face downward, worshipping and praising Jehovah for His goodness.

7: For the next seven days, the people feasted upon the sacrifices; visitors came from across the nation to take part in these festivities. The Lord told Solomon, "I have chosen this House and shall occupy it forever."

Afterwards, Solomon repaired, armed and walled many of the cities of Samaria. During the building of the palace, the Temple, the public works, and the fortifications of the cities, he used few of the Israelites for labor; instead, Solomon forced the enslaved Canaanites to do the actual labor in the construction of these edifices.

This mighty Israelite ruler received tribute from many kings and the Queen of Sheba; he built ships and traded with far away lands; he owned horses and chariots, and stables, and was rich and powerful. Solomon's life is further described in the "Book of Nathan, the Prophet", and "Ahijah, the Shilonite", and in the "Visions of Iddo, the Seer". He was succeeded by his son, Rehoboam.

Within five years, the kingdom which David had forged and

which Solomon had enjoyed, was divided. The ten tribes of Israel rebelled against Rehoboam because he refused to discontinue Solomon's policy of exacting heavy tribute and service from the people. Only Judah (with the tribe of Benjamin) remained with Rehoboam. The ten tribes of Israel selected Jeroboam as their king.

Jeroboam worshipped idols and appointed his own priests, many of whom were not of the tribe of Levi. In general, he led Israel into idol worship and activities prohibited by Jehovah. Many of the Levite priests deserted Samaria and came to Jerusalem.

12: When Rehoboam neglected worship of Jehovah, Jehovah sent King Shishak of Egypt into Canaan, and Shishak defeated Jerusalem and claimed the palace treasures. At that time, Judah was weak — for Judah and Israel, led by their respective kings, Rehoboam and Jeroboam, were continually at war with each other.

Abijah, succeeding Rehoboam, thrashed King Jeroboam's Israelites in an invasion of the Northern Kingdom, killing 500,000 men. His son, Asa, refortified the cities of Judah. He removed many of the idol altars and shrines, and smashed the images. His defenders repelled an invasion by the Ethiopians. At Jerusalem, Asa and his people sacrificed seven hundred oxen and seven thousand sheep in celebration of their victory, and pledged to worship only the God of Abraham.

They stipulated that any one who refused to worship the God Jehovah would die.

During Asa's reign, he made an alliance with Syria against King Baasha of Israel and acquired some of the Israelite cities. When Asa died, his son, Jehoshaphat, as king, continued the policies that his father had begun. Neighboring nations paid him tribute. He joined with King Ahab of Israel in a plan to attack Syria.

Four hundred heathen prophets promised them victory, but the prophet Micaiah prophesied defeat. Ahab told Jehoshaphat that Micaiah always gave prophesies of doom and so they disregarded his advice. They attacked. The Syrians defeated them, killing Ahab, but Jehoshaphat escaped.

Home once again, Jehoshaphat appointed (from the Levites) judges throughout the kingdom, with the High Priest being the high authority. When a coalition of Ammon, Moab, and Mt. Seir gathered to strike Judah, Jehoshaphat assembled his people before the Temple, prostrated himself, and prayed to Jehovah. Through the prophet Jahaziel, Jehovah answered, promising that they need not be afraid for they would win.

Next day, the army of Judah, led by a choir singing the song

"His Mercy Endures Forever", marched out to meet the oncoming enemy. Then the armies of Ammon, Moab and Mt. Seir began to fight among themselves; they destroyed each other. Jehoshaphat and his people walked among the corpses of the dead soldiers, removing jewelry, clothing and riches from the bodies.

Jehoshaphat began a ship building enterprise with King Ahaziah of Israel, but one calamity after another prevented the launching of the vessels.

21: When Jehoram, oldest son of Jehoshaphat, and son-in-law of Ahab of Israel, became king, he slew his brothers and many of the Israel princes. During his rule of Judah, Edom and Libnah rebelled and set up their own kingdom. He led his people in idol worship, so Jehovah caused the Arabs and the southern Philistines to attack him, take his outer fortifications, and carry away his wives. Jehovah sent him a bowel disease, causing his death.

Ahaziah, Jehoram's youngest son, became king. Ahaziah and King Jehoram of Israel, together, made war upon the Syrians and lost. Their friend, Jehu (appointed by Jehovah to become king of Israel), slew them both.

Ahaziah of Judah was succeeded by Athaliah, his mother, who killed all of Ahaziah's sons, except the infant Joash, and took the throne.

Subsequently, Jehoiada, the priest, brought Joash, a child, from hiding and, in a conspiracy involving the priests of the Temple, anointed him king and slew his grandmother. With the help of Jehoiada, High Priest, Joash ruled Judah for a number of years. Through Jehoiada, Baal's temple was destroyed, Jehovah's Temple was rebuilt, and sacrifices and daily worship were again a part of the routine life of the people.

After Jehoiada died, King Joash returned to idol worship. When Zechariah (Jehoiada's son) warned the people to return to the worship of Jehovah, King Joash, himself, ordered Zechariah stoned.

When Joash and the people of Judah abandoned the worship of Him, Jehovah allowed the Syrian army to conquer and loot Judah. Joash, wounded, was slain in his bed by some of Jehoiada's sympathizers, leaving the kingdom to his son.

25: Amaziah executed the people who had killed his father. He mobilized an Army of 300,000 men, and hired 100,000 more from Israel, but on the advice of his prophets, he separated the 100,000 Israelites from his army and sent them home.

Then, while Amaziah defeated the forces of Mount Seir in the Valley of Salt, killing 10,000 of them on the battlefield and throwing another 10,000 of the captives off a mountain top, the Israel army he had hired and retired fell upon the undefended cities of Judah, killing 3,000 townspeople.

King Amaziah worshipped the idols that he had captured in Edom and refused to heed the advice of his prophets. He challenged Israel to fight. King Joash of Israel warned Amaziah that Israel's forces were not to be compared with the forces of Edom, which Amaziah had just conquered, and that it would be wiser for Amaziah and the people of Judah to stay home.

Amaziah would not hear. He insisted upon the battle. So they fought. Amaziah was trounced. The Israelites invaded Judah, tore down the walls of Jerusalem and seized the palace and Temple treasures.

Fifteen years later, Amaziah was assassinated, as fully described in the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah and Israel, and his son, Uzziah, became king. Uzziah defeated the Philistines and regained some of the lands which they had taken. He maintained an efficient army, dug many wells in the desert, and was generally successful.

But he erred. He entered the Holy Place of the Temple and burned incense upon the altar. Eighty-one priests, led by Azariah, courageously filed into the Temple area and demanded that King Uzziah leave at once, warning him that the Lord had reserved burning of incense to the priests. Uzziah at first refused to budge — then, as he talked, his forehead became white with leprosy patches. With the help of the priests, he hurried out of the Temple, but it was too late. He remained a leper until his death, ruling from quarantined quarters through his son, Jotham. When Uzziah died, Jotham became king in his own right.

Jotham defeated the Ammonites, exacted tribute from them, and generally, during his reign, followed the law of God. He was succeeded by his son, Ahaz.

Ahaz was a Baal believer. He sacrificed and burned incense at the altars in the hills. In the Valley of Hinnom, he burned his own children as sacrifices. So Jehovah allowed Syria to subjugate him and his people. Innumerable Judean captives were taken to Damascus. In his wars with Israel, he usually lost, sustaining enormous casualties. In one campaign, the Israelites killed 120,000 of his soldiers and carried away 200,000 Judean women and children to Samaria.

The prophets of Samaria warned the troops about making slaves of their own people, their brothers and sisters, the Judeans. The leaders of Samaria paid little heed, but they did feed and clothe the captives, and sent those who were sick or old to Jericho.

King Ahaz suffered defeat not only from his brothers in Israel, but also sustained military losses to the armies of Edom and the Philistines. The King's morale was low. He sent that which was left of the Temple and palace treasures, gold and silver, to Tilgath-pilneser, Assyrian king, and asked for help. When the Assyrians arrived, instead of helping Ahaz, they attacked him.

Ahaz reasoned that since the Assyrians had been successful in their battles, their gods would help him. So he adopted their worship and made altars to their gods and closed the doors of Jehovah's Temple to prevent worship there by the Judeans.

29: Hezekiah succeeded Ahaz. His first act as king was to open the Temple doors. He met with his priests and their assistants, all Levites. They cleaned and sanctified the Temple and Hezekiah sacrificed seven bulls, seven rams, seven lambs, and seven goats as a sin offering for the people of Judah. Hezekiah reinstalled the Levite Temple music, composed of cymbals, psalteries, harps, trumpets, and singers. Throughout the consecration festival, the musicians played, the people sang, and there was prayer and rejoicing.

The Judeans brought their offerings, seventy bulls, one hundred rams, two hundred lambs, six hundred oxen, and three thousand sheep, together with grain and drink. Hezekiah invited his brothers of Israel, Ephraim and Manasseh, to participate with them in the Passover celebration in the Temple at Jerusalem. The priesthood from far and near came to be sanctified in order that they could preside over the celebration. The people followed. For seven days, the Passover feast endured, and enjoyed such success that the leaders continued it for another seven days. The people sacrificed two thousand young bulls, seventeen thousand sheep, together with other gifts. They feasted on the sacrifices, gave thanks to Jehovah, and sang songs of praise.

Immediately following the Passover, enthusiastic participants returned to their cities throughout the land of Judah and Israel and destroyed the idol altars, images, and temples of other gods.

Hezekiah asked the people to bring their tithes to Jerusalem. The people came, giving freely of their crops, corn, wine, oil, honey, and other goods, laying the tithes in front of the Temple. So many tithed that huge mounds of goods were strewn throughout the Temple site. Hezekiah arranged for chambers in the Temple, where the goods were placed, appointed storekeepers and made food allotments for the priests in the cities throughout the land. He arranged for a fair distribution of the goods which were given to Jehovah.

When Sennacherib of Assyria besieged Jerusalem, Hezekiah stopped up the springs outside the city to prevent the Assyrians from having water. Sennacherib sent a message to the defenders, stating that the gods of other cities and other nations had not been able to save their peoples from the Assyrians and there was no reason to think that the people of Jerusalem would be in any better position in relying on their God to save them.

He and his messengers spoke as disparagingly about the Jerusalem God as they did the idol gods. They insulted and mocked Jehovah. Hezekiah and Isaiah, the prophet, prayed to

the Lord God. God sent an angel, who demolished the Assyrian army. When Sennacherib returned home, he was assassinated by his sons.

Although the Assyrians were successful throughout Judah, they were not successful at Jerusalem, and, as a result, Hezekiah gained considerable fame and honor. He constructed a line bringing water into the City of David and built storehouses to contain the treasures sent him from throughout his kingdom.

Manasseh succeeded his father, Hezekiah, upon his father's death, and immediately set out to undo much of the good his father had done. He rebuilt the altars of Baal, the shrines of the heavenly bodies in the hills and even in the Temple yard of Jehovah. He burned his own children. He consorted with witches, mediums and wizards.

Manasseh placed and worshipped an idol in the Temple of God, the same Temple where God had made His promises to David and Solomon. Jehovah, riled at this affront to Him, caused the king to be captured by the armies of Assyria and carried to Babylon. But when Manasseh repented, Jehovah heard him and caused him to be returned to Jerusalem. Then Manasseh knew that Jehovah was God.

Then Manasseh rebuilt the Jerusalem walls which had been torn down, removed the idol gods from the hills, and from the Temple, and repaired the altar of Jehovah. He commanded his subjects to worship Jehovah, God of Abraham, at the Temple site. The people did follow the Lord God, but they still sacrificed upon Jehovah's altars in the hills.

At Manasseh's death his son, Amon, became king. Amon bowed down before the carved images. He was killed by servants who, in turn, were slain by a citizens' vigilante committee, and his son, Josiah, ascended the throne.

34: Josiah destroyed the heathen altars, idols, images, and the tools of Baal. He organized crews who collected money for the Temple repair. During the rebuilding, Hilkiah, the High Priest, found a book which he declared to be the laws of God as given to Moses.

Josiah appointed leaders throughout the domain. These officers scheduled public meetings at which they read the words of the book to the people.

In April in the reign of Josiah, there was a great celebration of the Passover, attended by the people throughout Judea. The priests were organized. When everything was prepared, thousands of lambs, goats, and bulls were killed, the blood sprinkled upon the altars as required by the law, the fat and entrails burned, and the meat eaten by the priests and the people in a joint feast.

The reign of Josiah ended in the battle of the Valley of Megiddo.

The battle came about in this way: The Egyptians, under King Necho, were marching toward Megiddo for a fight with the Assyrian forces. King Josiah challenged him.

Necho answered: "Don't fight with me. God is with me and you will be destroyed. Leave me to fight the Assyrian army. I have no quarrel with you."

Josiah attacked. His Judeans were no match for Necho's vast armed might, and they were quickly routed. Josiah, wounded by Egyptian arrows, fled to Jerusalem and bled to death on the way. His son, Jehoahaz, became king.

Jehoahaz' crown was removed by the Egyptian king, who appointed Eliakim (whose name was changed to Jehoiakim) king of Judah in his stead. Eleven years later, King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon over-ran Jerusalem, captured Jehoiakim and carried him to Babylon.

Jehoiachin, son of Jehoiakim, became king. He was eight years old and had an evil reign of three months and ten days. Nebuchadnezzar replaced him with his brother, Zedekiah, who was twenty-one. He also was evil in the eyes of Jehovah because he paid no attention to Jeremiah the prophet. Later, Zedekiah declared his independence of King Nebuchadnezzar.

Judah's priests, Levites (even the High Priest), and the citizens had regularly worshipped the idols of other nations even though the prophets repeatedly warned them. So Jehovah caused the Babylonians to war against them, kill their men and women, pillage their cities, burn their temples, enslave the survivors, and deport them to Babylon.

And for seventy years the Judeans were exiled in Babylon, slaves, until freed by the Persians.

When King Cyrus of Persia conquered Babylon, one of his first decrees was that the Jews should be permitted to return to Jerusalem and the land of Judah that the Temple of God might be rebuilt.

Thus was the prophesy of Jeremiah fulfilled.

EZRA

Seventy years after the people of Judah had been deported to Babylon, King Cyrus of Persia conquered it. In his first year, Cyrus freed the captive peoples in the nations occupied and ruled by Persia, including the people of Judah. He proclaimed that the Jews who desired could now return to their own land.

Many of the Jews elected to remain in Persia. They gave, to those who elected to leave, gifts of camels, donkeys, utensils, gold and silver, totaling in value more than \$500,000. King Cyrus, himself, returned to the Jews 5,400 utensils which had been taken from the Temple at Jerusalem.

Only 42,360 persons returned to Judah, with 7,337 slaves and 200 singing men and women minstrels. They came from numerous subclans, including subclans of priests, and were led by Zerubbabel, Jeshua, Nehemiah, Seraiah, Re-el-aiah, Mordecai, Bilshan, Mizpar, Bigvai, Rehum, and Baanah.

Some of the groups had lost their genealogies. Those priests which had lost their genealogies were denied the privilege of acting as priests, or even partaking of the sacrificial food due the priests. But then, a priest with Urim and Thummim used the devices to determine whether they were qualified Levites.

They settled in the City of David and other towns of Judah. In Jerusalem, Jeshua and Zerubbabel led the other priests in rebuilding the altar where it had once stood. They and the people began using it for morning and evening offerings. In September, they observed the Tabernacle Festival, made their Sabbath offerings, and began following their customary mode of worship.

In less than two years, they began laying the foundation for the Temple. The Levites dictated the design of the work to the workers. When the framework was erected, it was apparent that there would be no comparison between it and Solomon's beautiful Temple. Many of the old men wept, but for the most part, there was jubilation and celebration for having proceeded that far in the construction.

4: Many of those living in Jerusalem at the time the refugees returned attempted to discourage the Temple workers. They wrote letters to the kings of Persia warning of a Jewish rebellion if the Temple was rebuilt. King Ar-ta-xerxes of Persia commanded that the construction of the Temple cease, and the work was stopped.

Sixteen years later, when Persia crowned Darius king, the prophets Haggai and Zechariah encouraged the renewal of efforts to rebuild their sacred edifice. Governor Tatnai notified Darius that the Jews had told him that they had been previously authorized by King Cyrus to do this work. "They are proceeding," his message to Darius said. "What shall I do?"

King Darius caused a search to be made and discovered in the records that King Cyrus, indeed, had made such an order. He

wrote the presiding governor that the Jews were to be permitted to continue building the House of Jehovah, and were to be aided by the Persian officials in gifts of money, food and sacrificial animals.

When the Temple was finished, it was dedicated with the sacrifice of one hundred bulls, two hundred rams, four hundred lambs (twelve scapegoats), and food, drink and other offerings, at that time and during the Passover following.

7: Ezra, the priest, a direct descendant of Aaron, well educated in the laws of Moses, left Babylon during the reign of Ar-ta-xerxes, arriving in Jerusalem shortly thereafter. (The reign of Ar-ta-xerxes was about sixty years after the completion of the Temple.) He carried with him a letter from the Persian king which commissioned him to take money, gold and God's laws to Judah and investigate the status of the religious worship at the Temple in Jerusalem.

Ezra was accompanied by priests and certain leaders of the tribe, including the Levites Eliezer, Ari-el, Shemaiah, Elnathan, Jarib, Nathan, Zechariah, and Meshullam. Persia's gifts of silver, gold, and utensils valued at more than \$5,000,000, were delivered by Ezra's band and placed in the Temple.

Ezra learned that the men of Judah were following some of the customs of the Canaanites, Hittites, Perizzites, Jebusites, Ammonites, Moabites, Egyptians, and Amorites. Even worse, many of them had married girls who were not Jews, and the Holy Seed of God's chosen ones had commingled with foreign blood and produced impure offspring. Ezra despaired, tore his clothing, wailed, pulled hair from his head, and grieved. He prayed to his God:

"I am grateful, my Lord, that our people have been permitted to return to Jerusalem, freed from bondage by the King of Persia, to rebuild God's Temple. But I am ashamed, for we have defiled ourselves. We have allowed our sons and daughters to intermarry with our neighbors and those who occupied our land. By our intermarriage, we have broken Your commandments."

The people, greatly concerned, asked Ezra how they might rectify the matter. One of them, Shechaniah, suggested that they divorce their non-Jewish women and put them, and the children of the impure union, away. So Ezra obtained from the people of Israel and their leaders a promise that they would make these divorces.

A proclamation was made throughout Judah for the men of Judah to come to a meeting. At this meeting (held outside during a rainstorm), they decided that Ezra and his subordinates would hold hearings for them in the various cities throughout Judah. In those cases where the Jew had married a non-Jewish woman, as determined at such trial, he would separate himself not only

from the woman, but also from his children he had by her.

So this was done. Twenty-seven of the priests, also guilty, were forced to divorce their wives, and leave their children. Many members of the various clans, including Parosh, Elam, Zattu, Bebai, Bani, Harim, Hashum, and Nebo, etc., were found to have married foreign women and were forced to divorce them.

NEHEMIAH

Nehemiah's memoir.

"When I (Nehemiah) was living in the palace of King Artaxerxes in Persia, I met with some Jews who had returned from Jerusalem. They described the very slow progress of the work of rebuilding the Holy City. I remembered God's promise to Moses that He would scatter His people throughout the nations, but that someday He would return them to Jerusalem, the city where He had chosen to live.

"I wept often in the months following.

"My king, whom I served as cup-bearer, noticed my depression, and when he learned the reason, authorized me to go home. I left at once, arriving in Jerusalem with letters from the king directing the officers of Jerusalem to furnish materials for rebuilding a portion of the city, a home for me, and provide assistance to me generally.

"Governor Sanballat and his staff did nothing to make me welcome and discouraged my undertaking the work. Nevertheless, with the help of Eliashib, the High Priest, I organized the Jewish citizens and began the rebuilding. We repaired several sections of the wall, constructed the fish gate, repaired the old gate, the furnace tower, the valley gate, dung gate, fountain gate, and the sheep gate, with sections of walls in between. The priests and city officials supervised.

"During our efforts, Sanballat and his subordinates mocked us and ridiculed the result of our work. They began to harass us, and in order to continue, we armed half our people and placed them to watch along the walls while the other half worked with their weapons nearby. I prayed to God that He would repay Sanballat and his friends by making them captives some day.

"Some of our brothers had become rich and were oppressing their kin with high interest rates and even slavery of their brother's children. I called a public meeting. I rebuked the rich Jews. They repented, agreeing to restore to their fellows their homes, vineyards, and other properties.

"We continued our rebuilding. My life was threatened by Sanballat and his servants (residents of the city who were living there when the Jews returned from exile). When the wall was finished, I appointed my brother, Hanani, the ruler of our people, and made assignments of armed watchmen throughout the city to protect the walls and gates which we had constructed.

"I presented the list of genealogies of the Jews of Judah who had returned from Babylon. There were 42,360 tribesmen, including the priests and their ten leaders. Some of the clans had lost their family records. So, also, had some of the priests. We used the Urim and Thummim in order to determine whether they were of priest heirship.

8: "In September, Ezra read to the people the book containing Moses' laws. Ezra read the law, and the priests and Levites circulated among the people explaining what the law meant. The people wept. They built booths of tree branches on the roofs of their houses, in which they lived during the seven days of the feast of the seventh month, complying with the commands of Ezra's book.

"In October, the people wore sackcloth, threw dirt upon themselves and worshipped God, as they listened to the laws being read to them. Then, led by Ezra and the priests, the people prayed:

"Our God — Maker of the heavens and the earth — You rescued us from Egyptian bondage. We sinned, and You forced us into exile. But Your feeling for us passes understanding and, when You saw us forlorn and beaten, You rescued us again and now have returned us to Jerusalem. We are still slaves in the land which You had given to us. Yet we know Your judgment was fair, for our sins were many. We are Your people. We are sorry. We fully repent. Once more we agree to serve You.'

"Then Ezra presented a covenant which was signed by him, the princes, priests, and Levites (including myself as governor), intended to bind all the people of Judah. It contained the following provisions:

"We covenant with Jehovah that we will obey His laws, forbid and prevent intermarriage of our sons or daughters with non-people of foreign religions on that day), pay a Temple levy, provide wood for the burnt offerings, tithe our crops to the Temple, and give our oldest sons and the first-born of our cattle, herds, and flocks, and also bread, oil, and wine, as the law prescribes.'

"Later, I appointed priests from the various cities and directed them to live in Jerusalem. I chose some of the Levites to preside as judges and act as city workers. Trumpeters and gate keepers were selected.

"When that portion of the law was read that said Ammonites and Moabites would not be permitted to participate in the Temple worship, the meeting stopped while the rejected ones departed. I restored the Temple to its former use, and tithes were once again received into it. I appointed priests and Levites as treasurers of the storehouses and distributors of the shares.

"When I observed that outside merchants were bringing goods and wares into Jerusalem on the Sabbath, I ordered the city gates to be closed on Friday evening through the Sabbath, and placed guards on the walls to keep them out. I expelled Jehoiada (son of Eliashib, the High Priest) from the Temple because he was a son-in-law of Governor Sanballat.

“Many of the Jews had married women from Ashdod, Ammon, or Moab, and had children by them. With force and argument, I compelled these men to divorce their wives and abandon their children; and they sent them away.

“Oh, my God, remember my good deeds; keep in mind these things I have done for You and Your House.”

ESTHER

Comment

The author — a Jew, maybe, although certainly not Mordecai, as tradition claims.

The text reflects the author's personal knowledge of Persian custom and geography. There are those who claim that it was written in the 2nd Century, two or three hundred years after the time of the events it purports to describe.

* * * * *

After King Ahasuerus had ruled the Persian Empire (India to Ethiopia) for about three years, he gave a magnificent celebration at which princes and high officials of his Empire attended. When the successful holiday was ended, he sponsored a special feast for his palace staff. There was much drinking. With the party at its peak and the king's heart merry with wine, he called for lovely Queen Vashti to join him. He wished to exhibit her beauty before his friends.

Queen Vashti would not come. The King, embarrassed, fumed. He asked his counselors for advice.

They conferred together, and then told the frustrated ruler to see the Queen no more. They pointed out that if he did not act, the wives of other officials throughout the kingdom would behave in the same manner in which Queen Vashti had acted and there would be discontent everywhere.

So the King followed their advice and banished his Queen. Everyone was happy except him. He longed to touch her. The vision of her would not leave him.

To assuage the King's grief, a search was made by the King's helpers for the most beautiful girls in the Empire, and from these the very most beautiful were selected for his harem. The King was to choose a new queen from the harem. Esther (whose real name was Hadassah, a Jewess), was picked for the harem.

In January of the King's seventh year of rule, it became Esther's turn to sleep with the King. The King was pleased. He preferred her to the other girls with whom he had slept. He named Esther his queen.

Esther had been reared by Mordecai (grandson of Shime-i), and he and Esther, working together, warned the King of a plot against his life. They cultivated his favor and gained his approval. The King clothed Mordecai in royal apparel and princely headdress.

The King's chief assistant, Haman, became vexed with Mordecai because Mordecai, unlike the other palace servants, refused to bow to him as he passed by. He learned that Mordecai was a Jew and that the Jews throughout the kingdom were of a

similar temperament. So Haman asked the King for a decree whereby the Jews living within the kingdom would be exterminated. He agreed to pay the \$25,000,000 involved in the cost of this enterprise. The King declined the offer of the money, but told Haman to go ahead with the work.

Messages, bearing the King's seal, were sent into all the provinces reciting the King's order that all the Jews would be killed on February 28th of the next year. Mordecai tore his clothing, covered himself with sackcloth and ashes, and mourned, weeping and wailing. He notified Esther that she would also be affected by the decree. He asked her to seek help from the King.

Esther pushed aside her fear that the King would order her execution if she appeared in court without his invitation, and approached the King in his innercourt. He was in a good mood and agreed to dine with her that evening. Haman was also invited and he promptly accepted, pleased that he would feast with the King and Queen (he did not know that Esther was a Jewess).

Haman ordered the preparation of a gallows upon which to hang Mordecai. That evening, he went to Esther's banquet. While the King dined amidst the seductive luxury Esther had prepared, she disclosed to the King that she was a Jew, one of many whom Haman had contrived to have killed. The King ordered that Haman be hung upon the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. His property was given to Queen Esther, and Mordecai was appointed first assistant to the King.

Mordecai and the Queen urged Ahasuerus to recall his order of death. On the 23rd of July, the King sent letters into the various parts of the kingdom, giving the Jews the right to defend themselves from any who sought to oppress them.

Thus, when the 28th of February came, the Jews slaughtered their enemies, 500 men in Sushan, the ten sons of Haman, and 75,000 more of their foes living in the provinces. Mordecai urged his brethren to declare the 28th of February of each year a holiday to celebrate with feasting and joy their victories over their enemies. The celebration would be called Purim, which means throwing dice, because Haman and the King threw dice to determine the date of the purge. The deeds of King Ahasuerus and the honors won by Mordecai are fully described in the records of the Kings of Media and Persia.

JOB

Comment

Author — unknown. The time of the writing — unknown. Poetry and prose, perhaps written sometime between 600 and 400 B.C. An apologue? Or a narrative of actual fact?

* * * * *

The wealthiest man in the land of Uz was Job, who had, among other properties, 7,000 sheep, 3,000 camels, 500 teams of oxen, and 500 female asses. He was the proud father of seven sons and three daughters. Job was as good as he was rich and offered regular and extra sacrifices for himself and his sons.

Once, in a conversation with Satan, in the presence of other angels, God pointed out to Satan the piety of Job. Satan jeered, "It is easy for him to revere you while he is rich; if these circumstances should change, he would curse you."

So God permitted Satan to destroy Job's oxen, kill all of his sheep, cause bandits to steal his camels and slay his slaves, and contrive a storm which killed his seven sons and three daughters.

Job fell upon the ground, tore his clothes, and cried, but he blessed God and did not curse Him.

At the next meeting of God, the angels, and Satan, God exultantly pointed out to Satan how Job's confidence in Him had not wavered, despite his transgressions. Satan insisted that Job would curse God if he was afflicted with diseases. So God gave permission for Satan to cause Job physical harm.

Satan smote Job with boils from the soles of his feet to the top of his head. As Job lay in pain, his wife urged him to curse his God. He would not.

For several days Job lay helpless, a grotesque and distorted mass of pus and bloody flesh. His friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar came and sat with him. For seven days and nights they mourned, tearing their clothes, throwing dust over their heads, loudly weeping and moaning. Then Job spoke:

"Cursed be the day that I was born. Why should a man be born to a life of failure and misery. My pain is so great that I can neither eat nor sleep."

Then Eliphaz spoke to Job: "Innocent people are not punished. The sinful reap their harvest of misery and death. Therefore, seek God's guidance. If you will do this, you will live a good life and have many descendants who themselves will become prestigious and content."

6: Job answered: "Why doesn't God kill me and free me from the pain of this cursed illness? And you, Brother Eliphaz, haven't been much help to me. Your criticism does not apply to me. Explain wherein I have transgressed. Do not accuse me — why

would I not know and say so if I had sinned.

"My life is hopeless. The boils which cover my body do not heal, but remain open, filled with worms, keeping me in constant pain. Why has God chosen me for this punishment?"

Bildad, ceasing his wailing, interrupts:

"If you were pure, God would answer your prayer."

And Job said: "It is true that I may have sinned even though I have made every effort to be clean, for man sins without realizing it. But why doesn't God tell me what I have done wrong? Why is He doing this to me? Would God inflict a punishment of such magnitude upon me for a sinful deed of such insignificance that I do not know what it is? Doesn't my many good deeds offset any small wrong I may have done? Why does He torture me? Why was I born?"

11: Zophar advises Job: "God is perfect and yet you dare to criticize His treatment of you. Isn't this sin? You should turn to God and ask forgiveness."

And Job retorted: "It appears that you are a Mister Know-it-all. I'll tell you this — I, a righteous man, am now an object of scorn to my neighbors. I know that God is mighty. Of course He is. So do not pretend to be speaking for God when God has not placed such thoughts in your mind or words in your mouth.

"I *am* innocent! Who knows better than I? Certainly not you. God has given me such a short time to be here — it does not appear to be just that He would make me miserable during this time I have."

Eliphaz responded at once: "Job, have you no respect for God? And you dare to be angry with Him? You know that the wicked man may seem to be successful for a while, but then his fortunes will turn, and he will be punished for his sins."

Job replied:

"I know all that. I must say that the three of you are not doing much to comfort me. Your words are empty, meaningless, and of no consequence. My grief continues. I am naught but wrinkled remains — God tortures me and tears at my flesh. My face is swollen from weeping, and I am so tired that I can hardly open my eyes.

"I, myself, have wronged no one.

"Does the only witness to my innocence reside in Heaven? Since you, my friends, have not been of help to me, I prefer that you leave me with my pain and let me die."

"Do not delude yourself," Bildad scolded. "You are ill because you have been wicked and have not repented. You have not accepted God."

And Job moaned: "For shame on you who constantly accuse me without any proof of my guilt. The truth is that God has destroyed

my hope, attacking me in many ways which cause me pain and anguish, even though I have not wronged others. — Still — I know my Redeemer lives — when I am resurrected, I will see for myself.

“And so I say to you, do not persecute me longer in the assumption of my guilt.”

20: Zophar retorted: “You cannot shame me from answering. The evidence is clear. You have erred. Do not be hypocritical. The wicked may realize temporary pleasures and success, but his joy will soon turn to sadness. God’s wrath will punish him.”

Job wailed in reply: “Look at me, if you can. In my sickness I am repugnant to your sight. Do not mock me.

“You have not spoken the truth, for you yourself have observed how the wicked are rich and powerful men with great influence, living long and fruitful lives.

“Who can judge God? Those who are strong, rich, fat, or evil die with those who are weak, poor, skinny, or righteous. They are treated the same.”

Eliphaz said: “I insist that somewhere you have made a mistake and sinned. You must have failed to aid the poor, or neglected a widow or orphan, or made some other mistake. Obviously, God is not punishing you because you were good, but because you are wicked. Accept God’s judgment. Repent and find peace.”

Job answers: “God knows everything about me and everything I have done. I cannot see Him for He is hidden, but since He knows all about me, He knows that I am innocent. I have followed His commandments. Why now doesn’t God come to my aid?

“It appears that God is on the side of the rich and powerful, even though they, too, like the poor and the righteous, shall in the end be consumed by the grave.”

Bildad agreed, “True, and yet God is so powerful that how can you, a frail mortal, no more than a worm, stand before Him and assert sinlessness?”

Job continued: “What wise men you are. Just look at the help you have given me. What witty and clever remarks.

“Even as God is great and powerful, I vow by Him that I have not and will not speak falsely. I am innocent. I have not transgressed. As long as I live, I shall declare my innocence.

“Men have learned to make fire, mine silver, and refine metals, to farm, burrow through the earth, build levees to contain turbulent streams, and do many other magnificent works — yet, they know not how to find wisdom or understanding. Only God knows this.

“And now I, who once sat as judge, an honored officer of the city, am now ridiculed by those whom I once assisted and advised. God has given me darkness for light and bad for good. I have lived without lust, lies, or adultery, and I have aided the poor and the

homeless, the widows and orphans, and showed kindness toward my slaves. I have not sought wealth and I have never cursed anyone, not even an enemy.

"I ask for God's help, but He does not hear me. I am prosecuted by Him."

32: Elihu, angered at Job and his friends for their futile arguments, spoke up: "I speak without flattery, and my words may offend you. You claim innocence, Job, and accuse God of punishing you. Even in making your declaration of innocence, and in speaking of God in that manner, you have sinned.

"God is greater than man. He does not have to account to you. Why strive against Him?

"Your attitude is one of defiance and contempt. God is never wicked or unjust and you, Job, in accusing Him, sin. God punishes the wicked and rewards the good. Consider His wondrous works."

38: God spoke from the midst of a storm, answering Job:

"Who is this who speaks, in ignorance, of wisdom? If you are all-knowing, then tell Me: What are the dimensions of the earth and how was it measured? What are its foundations? Who laid its cornerstone? Who made the seashore and set the limits as to how far the oceans would encroach upon the land? Have you ever made a sunrise or searched the ocean bottoms, or determined the earth's breadth? Where is the light and darkness stored, if you know? Have you seen where hail is made or kept (I am reserving it for use in time of war)? Where does the East wind come from? Where will it go? Who causes the rain, dew, ice and frost? Can you change the seasons or the path of the stars? Who set the wild ass free? How stubborn is a man who argues with God? Speak up, Job, and answer Me."

Job meekly replied: "Twice have I spoken. I should have held my tongue. I am contemptible in Thy sight." He hung his head in shame.

God continued: "I demand an answer. Do you dare to judge My justice and condemn Me in order to win your argument? Behold Behemoth, monster animal, and Leviathan, monster fish! Can you defeat them? If not them, how could you expect to stand before Me? Can you capture Leviathan? No, for his hide is hard and darts and spears cannot pierce it. He is covered with overlapping scales, stuck together, and has ferocious teeth; flames come from his mouth and smoke from his nostrils and fire seethes in his eyes. Clubs, stones, spears and arrows are useless against him."

Job interrupted: "I was mistaken to speak as I did. Now that I have seen You, I repent."

God turned to Eliphaz: "You and your friends have not understood the situation either. I should punish you, but if you and your friends will offer seven bulls and seven rams as burnt sacrifices, I will spare you."

As Job prayed for his friends, the Lord healed him.

Then the Lord blessed Job and made him even more wealthy, giving him 14,000 sheep, 6,000 camels, 1,000 teams of oxen, and 1,000 female asses — and seven new sons and three more daughters — amounting to twice as much and as many as he had before.

PSALMS

Comment

The claims of the books themselves to authorship by David, the sons of Korah, Asaphi, and other individuals are not sufficient to cover the number of authors that have contributed over the centuries to the beautiful songs and poems contained in the book. The book of the Psalms grew by stages. The songs were collected from time to time by various collectors, perhaps over a period of a thousand years and as late as the Second Century B.C.

* * * * *

1: The good shall profit, the sinners shall die.

The nations have met together to plot against God and His anointed One. God scoffs at their efforts, declaring, "This is My selection as King of the Mountain of Zion. I have given Him power to crush the nations. He will rule them with an iron hand."

Therefore, serve Jehovah joyfully, lest you cause Him to anger and become the victim of His wrath.

3: *The following verses represent one of David's songs when he fled from his son, Absalom.*

My foes surround me, but I am not afraid because God is with me and if they attack me, He will defend me. God, hear my prayer, show me the way to defeat my many formidable foes. Do not be angry with me, but satisfy Your wrath against my enemies.

"I am grateful to you; I revere you; I praise you. My enemies will run from Your power, and You will defeat them and raze their cities. Save me now, Lord, and return me to Zion's Mount so that I might praise you there.

"Leave at once, my Lord. Smite the wicked and the pompous. It is not right that I should have to hide from evil men who occupy my place in the kingdom when I have been good and followed You. I place my trust in You. Judge me now and find that I am righteous. Shelter me; strike down my enemies."

18: *David's song celebrating his escape from Saul.* "God is my strength; He has saved me from my enemies. When I was hemmed in by fiercesome foes, I called upon God and He came from Heaven, riding on a cherub, from the darkness, breathing fire, midst a mighty earthquake.

"When my enemies attacked, I defeated them with the help of the Lord. He gave me strength for war, and cleansed me of my faults so that I would stay both powerful and innocent."

23: "God is like a shepherd to me. He stands beside me, guides me, and takes care of me. I fear no evil. I will look to and depend on Him during my lifetime and when I have died, will live with Him forever in Heaven."

24: "Pardon my sins. Give me decency and integrity. Examine

me to see that I am clean. I shall fear no one, You are with me. You are my rock. Protect me and punish the wicked.

"In Thee, O Lord, do I put my trust! I rejoice in Your mercy. I will continue to praise You. God, fight my enemies. I rejoice in Your strength. Destroy those who wish me harm. Do not rebuke me while Your temper is hot. Preserve my health. When I was ill, I confessed my sins and prayed hoping that You would heal me. My enemies wished my death, and I rejoice that You did save me. Amen and amen."

To the chief musician: "You are my King and we are Your people. It is only through You that we are able to win any victories whatsoever against our enemies. Sword, spears and arrows are not enough.

"At times You have fought for our foes, and we lost, and our enemies took our properties, razed our cities, and enslaved our people. You have dispersed us to all nations. We have been mocked and jeered by our neighbors; even our name has become a thing of contempt among the peoples of the world. We endured all these things which You have brought about and remain faithful to You. Because of serving You, we are no more than sheep to be slaughtered by our many enemies. Do not sleep, oh Lord, but help us.

"The Lord is great. We should continue to praise Him. He lives on Mount Zion (Jerusalem); He has established it as His Home forever.

"Man, rich or poor, wise or foolish, whoever he may be, must die like any animal; yet, the Most High will redeem his soul from the grave. God, the Creator of all animals, may have any of those He wishes; He doesn't need sacrificial animals, He wants the appreciation of His servants, and their obedience."

51: When King David murdered Uriah, and slept with Uriah's wife, Bath-sheba, God reproached him through Nathan the prophet. In reflecting upon that judgment, David wrote the following psalms:

"God have mercy upon me. I have sinned; take away the consequences of this foul deed which I have committed. Wash me whiter than snow. Do not punish me or the people of Jerusalem. When You have cleansed me, You will be pleased with me in my new attitude and the sacrifices I shall thereafter make to You."

52: David's song about Doeg, who had told Saul where David was hiding.

"Doeg, you are wicked and God will destroy you."

54: David's psalms concerning the attempt by the men of Ziph to turn him over to Saul: "My enemies seek my life. God, undo their

unity and substitute confusion. Commit them to violence, misery and death. Protect me, oh Lord.”

59: Once, at his home, King Saul’s men attempted to capture David, but David escaped and wrote:

“Jehovah, protect me from bloody men who would waylay me. Destroy the people of my neighboring nations that the world may know that Thou art Jacob’s protector. I loudly proclaim Your power.”

60: Anxiously awaiting the results of the battle involving his and the Syrian forces, and another battle involving his captain (Joab) and the Edomite forces, David prayed:

“God, have You deserted us? Are our armies in retreat?

“But You have promised us victory. Edom shall surrender to us. The might of Judah’s armies comes from Jehovah alone. He is a rock standing strong against our enemies.”

63: While David was hiding in the Judean wilderness, he sang:

“Help me in this waterless desert. Protect me from the villains who conspire against me. Your power is great. You have performed awesome works in behalf of Your people. Here are burnt offerings for Your pleasure. Help me scatter Your enemies. Together we shall rejoice in victory while our women divide the spoils of war.

“Save me from the pit into which I have fallen. I am fearful. I have always praised You. I report Your goodness to my friends. But now I need help. Remember — I am one of Your people. Your enemies have pushed down the walls of Your city and even destroyed Your sanctuary. There are no more prophets. Why do You wait? Your people suffer at the hands of their oppressors. Arise and smite the enemies of Your people.”

Psalms from sources other than those involving David —

79: “Avenge the defeat of Your people. Take vengeance upon our neighboring nations who hold You in scorn.”

80: “Rescue us, oh Lord.”

83: “God, we pray to You — do not be silent — smite our enemies. Do to them as You have done to our enemies in times past, whose bodies became the dust of our land. Prove to them that Israel’s God is the Most High.

“You have shown favor upon our country before. Help us again. We will obey Your commands. We will praise You forever. But act soon, oh Lord, I cannot praise You if I am dead. Hurry, my Lord, or Your miracles will come too late.

“You have promised that the offspring of David would be the kings of the land forever. You rule the raging of the sea and the movement of the wind; Your enemies fall before the sweep of Your arm. Yet, even now the crown of David is in the dust and his enemies occupy his cities. Why do You hide? Where is Your love? See how Your enemies jeered me, whom You anointed as king.”

90: Moses' prayer:

"God, You are great and we are small. Seventy years You have given us, no more than eighty. Our time flies swiftly, as the grass that is bright and vital in the morning dew, wilted by the afternoon sun, and brown with death as the sun sets. Protect us in the time which You have given; give us joy with the sorrow that surely comes."

102: A prophet's lament:

"Hear my cries, O Lord. I am sick, cursed by my enemies, destitute, and You are great, loving, forgiving and powerful. I will praise You always.

"You have promised me and Your people the land of Canaan forever. You cared for Abraham, provided for his descendants in Egypt, and brought them into the Promised Land led by Moses. You evicted the Gentiles and gave the fruit of their labors to Your chosen ones. When we were deported from the land, You brought us back to Canaan. You are good."

109: "God, take vengeance upon those who tell lies about me. Desolate their homes, make their children vagabond beggars, and let highwaymen take their property. Curse them as they have cursed others."

110: Jehovah said to the Lord: "You shall rule as My King when I defeat Your enemies, who shall prostrate themselves at Your feet.

"God has decreed that You, as Priest, in the succession of Melchizedek, shall rule Your enemies. Dressed in morning light, You will reign, attended by Your people. While You judge, Jehovah shall smite the Gentile nations."

114: "Remember that God split open the Red Sea, moved the mountains, divided the waters of the Jordan River, and caused fountains of clear water to flow from solid rock. Praise the Lord! I will bring Him sacrifices and worship Him in the Jerusalem Temple."

118: "His mercy endures forever. In His name I will fight the world. Sacrifice to Jehovah upon the altars."

120: "Deliver me from lying lips. I shall look only to You, not other gods, for You are the maker of the universe, not they. Give peace to Jerusalem. We trust You. You have returned the exiled to the Holy City. You have protected us in the rebuilding of it. May those who despise us be shamefully subjected."

132: "Arise, Lord, enter Your Temple which we have built for You; observe the Ark. Remember Your promise to David that one of his children would occupy the throne forever. You have chosen Jerusalem as Your home forever."

135: "God is great! He proved it with awesome wonders in Egypt. We shall not trust idols which cannot even speak, see, or hear."

136: "Thanks to the God of gods, the Lord of lords, the God of Israelites, who saved the Israelites, His chosen people, in Egypt, in the wilderness, and in their battles in the desert; remember His mercy forever. Praise Him!"

137: "Jehovah, do not forget to repay the Edomites."

139: "God, You know everything I am. You made me. I look to You for strength and security. Please slay the wicked and Your enemies who curse You. I despise them that hate You. Your enemies are my enemies."

141: "Save me from my own greed."

144: "Bless my Lord, my Protector. I sing His praises."

146: "Men cannot help, only the God of Jacob can help. He is the Keeper of Truth."

147: "Praise the Lord! He is rebuilding Jerusalem; He is bringing back Israel's outcasts. God made the sun, moon, and stars. Praise Him! He made the mountains, hills, trees, animals, reptiles, and birds. Yes, praise Him! He has chosen the people of Israel as His people. Praise His name!"

149: "God takes pleasure in His people. His people shall revere Him. He is their glory!"

150: "Praise God in the Temple. Praise Him with music, trumpet, song, harp, timbrel, stringed instruments, organs, cymbals and ceremony. Hallelujah!"

PROVERBS

Comment

Collections of wise sayings begun, perhaps, during the reign of Solomon, and added to and revised from time to time until, perhaps, the fifth Century B.C.

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(Much of Proverbs is omitted. Verses are selected at random in order to give a picture of the nature of the book.)

1: These are the proverbs of King Solomon by which he taught his people wisdom and understanding.

"Listen — only fools will not listen.

2: "Walk in the way of the righteous. Be humble. Tithe your earnings and receive ten fold from God. God places a curse upon the wicked and His blessing upon the righteous.

4: "Be calm and sincere. Beware of her whose honey sweet lips whisper sweet nothings in your ear. Avoid her.

6: "Don't guarantee somebody else's obligation. If you have already entered into such an obligation, do your best to escape it. Obey your father and mother. Beware the provocative beauty of the prostitute. Seek wisdom. Work hard, avoid laziness. Don't talk too much. Be honest, humble, and skillful.

"A beautiful woman without discretion is like a jewel of gold in a pig's snout.

"A wise man listens; a fool refuses to heed. He that is rich is sometimes poor while he that is poor may have much.

14: "Inability to control one's anger is the mark of the weak. Humility is better than pride. Wisdom is better than gold. An evil mind seeks disorder. Avoid greed, suspicion and rebellion. Seek intelligence, courage, and honesty.

20: "Be not deceived. Strong drink is disabling. Avoid contention, strife, price haggling, deceit, and dishonesty.

21: "God is more pleased in our actions than in our gifts; be just and fair, and avoid pride and greed.

22: "A good name is more than riches. Be generous; love a pure heart. Avoid the prostitute. Don't sign somebody else's note.

24: "Discipline your children. Stay away from prostitutes. Avoid too much strong drink. Take care of the means of your livelihood first and afterwards build your home."

25: The following Solomon proverbs were found by King Hezekiah's assistants, who recorded them: Do not be hasty in seeking court redress. Reprove gently; accept correction gratefully. Be concerned for others. Cultivate patience as a virtue. Control your ego. Do not meddle in the arguments of others. Avoid self praise. Obey the law. Treat others equally without regard to their station in life.

30: These are Agur's words: "I do not understand how an eagle flies through the sky, a serpent moves upon a rock, a ship sails upon the ocean, or the way of a man with a maid."

31: King Lemuel of Massa, says:

"Avoid strong drink. A good wife is worth more than gold. Praise her."

ECCLESIASTES

Comment

Author — unknown. Date — unknown.

* * * * *

These are the words of "The Preacher", the son of David, King of Jerusalem:

"Life is in vain. Where is the reward for man's lifetime of hard work? The seasons come, the seasons go, and men are born, live, and die. It is always the same; though we strive, all that we do has been done before, and will be done again.

"In seeking wisdom and understanding, I first sought to educate myself, but I found that the increase in my knowledge increased my frustration.

"I sought to be continually jolly. How foolish! So I tried drink, and then merriment again, and I still did not find the content for which I searched.

"I busied myself with constructive enterprises for others, building public gardens and buildings, and planting trees and vineyards. As I became rich, I added to my fame by buying horses, silver and gold, slaves, concubines, and wives. I was successful and renowned.

"Yet it was all so much vanity, with no profit under the sun. As death comes to the fool, so it also seeks me, all my wisdom or fame notwithstanding.

"Oh, the futility of it all.

"For everything there is a time: a time to be born, plant, harvest, kill, or heal; a time to destroy, rebuild, cry, or laugh, and a time to mourn or dance; a time to seek, lose, keep, speak or hush; a time for war and a time for peace — a time to die.

"Whatever God does is final. Earth's life is an endless repetitious cycle. Man, like the animals, must die, and the dust from which they are made will be the dust to which they return. Who can say that a man's spirit arises from the dust, while the spirit of the animals dies with them?

"Men should be happy now, and enjoy the life that is here. For when they are dust, they will not know of the events which follow.

"I have wondered whether the dead are more fortunate than the living, and whether the most blessed are those that will never be born. True, the downtrodden may work hard and rise to fame and fortune; yet, his fortune may be short-lived, and his power and fame fade away. Thus, all foolishness, a useless effort, with no profit under the sun.

5: "So it is good for a man to eat his fill, drink his wine, and appreciate the work that he is doing for his lifetime. To be able to do this is a gift from God.

“Man’s course has been preordained by God and it will do him no good to complain about it.

“Wisdom is better than wealth. Be joyful in prosperous times and do not be bitter in the days of adversity. Understand that God gives one as well as the other.

“It is a curious circumstance of life that fortune is kind to wicked men, while treating good men badly; yet, it is a phenomenon with which we must live. It may be best to eat, drink and be merry because of the uncertainty of the future.

“The rule of Life is chance. The rain falls on the godly and the ungodly alike. Enjoy life with food, drink and song, for in death there is no work, play, knowledge, or wisdom. The race does not always belong to the swiftest, nor the battle to the strongest, nor wealth to the most deserving; but, rather, it is a matter of luck.

“Rejoice in being alive. Honor your Creator in your youth. As you grow older, recognize the futility of all man’s effort and be at peace.

“Conclusion: Fear God — Keep His commandments! God will judge us on our good or bad deeds.”

THE SONG OF SOLOMON

Comment

Poem and Song — Some say Solomon wrote it. Others say Solomon would not have written this at all. Jewish tradition names an author who lived a few hundred years after Solomon died. Others argue that the author was from a much later period.

* * * * *

King Solomon's song of songs:

She: "Kiss me. It's nice to be here in your chambers. Though I am black, I am beautiful. Jewish girls should not snub me just because I am black. I have been working outside. I will join you at noon."

He: "How lovely you are. We shall make you exquisite jewelry."

She: "I am the rose of Sharon, and the king likes my perfume. He embraces me with his right hand, while his left supports my head. He is mine and I am his. All night, he is like a young stag on the mountain."

Jerusalem women: "Here is the great King Solomon in his chariot of gold and silver."

He: "You are beautiful with dove's eyes, thick hair (like a goat's), white teeth, red lips, slender neck, and breasts like twin young deer. You smell sweet."

She: "My beloved came to me — my white lover with head of pure gold, dove eyes, and wavy, black hair. His lips are scented. His body is jewel-studded ivory, his legs are of marble and he has golden arms, with a lovable and sweet mouth. But now, my lover has left me. He has gone to the garden."

He: "How lovely you are. The fairest of the fair."

Jerusalem women: "Come back, O Shulamite."

He: "How beautifully you dance, maid of Shulamite. How stately, like a palm tree, with breasts like clusters of fruit."

She: "Come to the fields with me where I will love you. Would that I could kiss you here in the presence of everyone. Marry me, my beloved."

"Come to me, beloved. Be like a young deer upon the mountains of spices."

ISAIAH

Comment

Tradition names Isaiah the author of all of this book. Claims are made for a second and third Isaiah who lived at a different time than the first and who made their contribution to the book in his name. There appear to be other insertions.

Of the Bible, Isaiah is the beginning of the poetry and prose of the prophets. Do not be concerned that the narrative is broken and confused. Poetry has been interspersed with the events.

The narratives of the prophets following Isaiah are more easily followed. Don't stop.

Isaiah was active — 725 - 750 B.C.

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Isaiah, a resident of Judah during the reigns of King Uzziah, King Jotham, King Ahaz, and King Hezekiah, had visions concerning Judah and Jerusalem.

"Hear," Isaiah warns, "the words of Yahweh: 'My people. My disobedient children, haven't you suffered enough? Why do you continue to provoke Me? You lie sick and weary in your desolated country, amidst cities which are blackened ruins. Your leaders offer your sacrifices hypocritically, without enthusiasm. Oh, My people, won't you repent? Let Me help you. Let Me help Jerusalem, My Holy City.'

"In the last days," Isaiah continued, "Jerusalem will be the world's capitol where Yahweh will rule the nations and settle their disputes. They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruninghooks. There will be no more wars. All mankind will humble themselves before Him. The idols will be destroyed.

"In the day of judgment Jerusalem will be without food, water and leadership. There will be rebellion and rioting as Yahweh judges His people. He will vent His anger first against the elders and the princes.

"Then He will judge the proud Jewish women with their tinkling bracelets, tilted noses, wanton eyes, and teasing walk. He will cover the faces of such women with sores, strip them of their jewelry and fancy clothing, and expose their bodies.

"They will bind themselves in sackcloth; they will become bald. Most of their men will die young and they will compete for the companionship of the few surviving males.

"Yahweh will say:

"I, Yahweh, expected more of My people. I looked for justice and found oppression. I searched for righteousness and saw only tears. Woe to those who spend their time in drunken pastimes, who sin, who are proud and haughty; woe to the vain evildoers

who justify the wicked for reward. My people shall feel the sting of My punishment.'"

6: In the year of the death of Uzziah, Isaiah saw Yahweh sitting on a high throne surrounded by six-winged angels. Each of these seraphs had two wings which covered his face, two wings over his feet, and two wings used by him for flight. Their singing of holy praises shook the Temple.

Isaiah was afraid. But one of the seraphs brought him a burning coal from the altar, placed it on his lips, and declared that his sins were forgiven.

Yahweh directed him to go as a messenger to His people. "Yet," He said, "the message will not be understood by them, nor will they see and perceive. They will not listen and they will fail. Their cities will be wasted and they, themselves, will be deported to other lands."

Jerusalem was simultaneously attacked by the troops of King Rezin of Syria and King Pekah of Israel. Ahaz, King of Judah, sought advice from Yahweh through Isaiah. Isaiah assured Ahaz (the Lord having told him) that there was nothing to fear. He suggested that Ahaz name a sign by which Yahweh could convey to him assurance of victory. Ahaz said no, he would not impose himself upon the Lord in that manner.

Isaiah exclaimed: "Anyway, through me, Yahweh chooses this sign. A child shall be born to a virgin and she shall call Him Immanuel. When this infant is a mere child, both the kings which you now fear will no longer reign.

"But later your nation will be sacked by foreign armies. Your farms will lie wasted, growing naught but weeds and thorn bushes."

8: The Lord told Isaiah: "Isaiah, you will have a son, and you shall call him Maher-shalal-has-baz, whose name means that Assyria will plunder Damascus and Samaria. The Assyrians will fill the land of Judah.

"Do not fear them, but fear only Me. For sometime in the future, this nation will again be filled with rejoicing. With the battle ended, the tools of war will be set aside and burned."

For unto us a Child is born; unto us a Son is given; and He shall rule the government of the day; He shall be called Wonderful, The Mighty God, The Everlasting Father, and The Prince of Peace. He will forever rule the nations of the world with an understanding justice from David's throne.

"Yahweh has had no joy in Israel's young men," Isaiah preached. "They are filthy with lies and trickery. He has set them against each other; the tribes of Israel war with each other

and all harass Judah. Yet this is not enough to cool his anger. So He will send the Assyrians against Judah, to kill, enslave, and plunder.

"When the Assyrian king defeats you, he will not realize that Yahweh directed it, but he will think his victory resulted from the strength of his forces. And so, when Yahweh has finished His use of the Assyrians, He will bring about their downfall. His people, the people of Judah, will escape.

"From the stem of Jesse (David) which had been severed, shall come forth a branch. He will rule the world and judge its peoples. In that day, there will be peace. The wolf and the lamb will lie together, and the calf shall walk among the lions.

"The nations will honor David's descendant. He will rule the exiled Jews who have returned from Assyria, Egypt, Pathros, Elam, Babylonia, Hamath, and the four corners of the earth to the Holy Mountain. United, they will attack the peoples of the East and West and retake the lands which were theirs.

"Yahweh will prepare a highway from Assyria for our freed captives there to return, and we will sing praises to Him."

13: Isaiah had this vision about Babylon:

"Babylonian armies will flee as the Medes, agitated by Yahweh, pursue them. Babylon burns, and the Babylonians cannot turn back the relentless surge of the invading armies. Their children are smashed before their eyes, their wives are raped and their homes are pillaged. The ravaged city lies naked and helpless.

"Yahweh shows mercy to Babylon's slaves, the Israelis. He causes them to be freed and sends them home, their beloved land of Canaan."

In the year King Ahaz died, Yahweh told Isaiah:

"The Philistine cities are doomed. The Assyrians are coming."

Here is what Yahweh messaged Moab, via Isaiah: "Your principal cities shall lie in ruins. Your homelands will become a land of blood and terror from which your whole population will flee; the nation shall end."

Isaiah reported Yahweh's message on Damascus: "Damascus' time will come. Only a few of her poorest people will be left. She, as well as other cities of Syria, will be forsaken."

Yahweh tells Isaiah of Egypt's future: "I, the Lord of Hosts, will deliver Egypt to a cruel, exacting king. The Nile River will dry up; with no crops, the Egyptians will know famine. Israel will subdue her, and Israel, Egypt and Assyria shall make an alliance and a highway between them and worship the same god."

During Sargon's rule of Assyria, Isaiah, at the command of God, went around stark naked in the community for three years. Isaiah explained that this was to signify the desolation which was to be visited upon both Egypt and Ethiopia. "For," Isaiah

said, "Yahweh tells me that the Assyrians will make the Egyptians walk naked and barefoot."

22: Again God talks of Jerusalem to Isaiah:

"I weep at the surrender of My people to the enemy. Death is everywhere. Since I have removed My protecting care, the Elamites and other foreigners ravish the land.

"I asked My people to repent, and they did not; they danced, played, and feasted. It was necessary that they be punished."

Through messages from Jehovah, Isaiah spoke of Tyre, Judah and Moab: "Tyre, your harbor is empty and your commerce has ended. Babylonia will besiege you and you will yield. Your existence will be aimless, and you will know no care for seventy years; then Jehovah will allow you to recover.

"As for Judah, it will become an abandoned wasteland. The world will war, and as Judah falls back and all appears to have been lost, the Lord of Hosts will subdue the kings of the earth and imprison them. He will take His throne in Jerusalem and rule with glory.

"The Lord will rule in Jerusalem wisely and forever. As He reigns, He shall stomp Moab like it was no more than straw beneath His feet. He will take His retribution against the wicked and give us peace. Those who followed Him will be resurrected from death."

As Isaiah wandered about the city, naked, he asserted:

27: "In that day when God rules, He will, by sword, punish Leviathan, the terrible sea dragon. His chosen people shall be rescued from Assyria and Egypt and returned to Jerusalem where lies the Holy Mountain of Zion.

"Woe to Samaria. It suffers at the hands of foreigners whom God has sent.

"Woe to Jerusalem. Time and time again Yahweh's punishment of those who live there will bring about its siege. But the Lord will save it from capture, launching thunder, earthquake, storm, and fire upon its attackers."

"Listen to God's words," Isaiah shouted to the people as he stood, naked, before them:

30: "'Woe to My own stubborn children of Judah who seek help from the Pharaoh of Egypt rather than appeal to Me. It will do them no good. Since they have not listened to Me, they will know hunger, cold, defeat, and misery. Egypt will not help them. And yet, when My people sing songs to Me again, I will answer their pleas. I will smite the Assyrians.'"

"A king is coming who will protect the people of Israel," Isaiah proclaimed. "Then they will awaken and listen to God. Evil men will no longer hide behind disguises. Our lands, which had not been fruitful, will become fertile; and as our spirits are renewed from Heaven, justice and peace shall be ours.

“Woe to the Assyrians. They have broken their agreements of peace; they have plundered the lands of Israel and Lebanon. But Jehovah says to them: ‘Your armies will fall back from the walls of Jerusalem’.

“Jehovah has lost His patience with Edom. With bloody sword, He will smite the land; it will become abandoned and for many generations, its desolate deserts shall belong to the thorn bushes and wild animals. Through the land, someday, will run a highway called ‘The Way of Holiness’.”

36: In the fourteenth year of the reign of King Hezekiah, Jerusalem was besieged by the forces of Sennacherib. From outside the walls, they hurled taunts against the Jews and insults upon Jehovah. They pointed out that the Lord God of Israel had not saved the people of Samaria, or of Hamath, or of other cities which had fallen to them, and, consequently, they argued, it was senseless to hope that the same God could save Jerusalem.

The besieged tore their clothing, wore sackcloth, covered themselves with dust and wailed. Hezekiah sought Isaiah’s help. Isaiah assured the king that Sennacherib would abandon his siege and return to his own country.

That very night, the Lord’s angel killed 185,000 Assyrian soldiers. The Assyrian army withdrew. Later, when Sennacherib attended his church at his home in Nineveh, he was slain by his own sons.

Another time (just before the siege), Jehovah told Hezekiah (through Isaiah) that he was going to die shortly from an illness. After Hezekiah had prayed, the Lord relented. He informed Isaiah that Hezekiah would live fifteen more years, and as proof of His promise, He would move the sun backwards (as could be observed by watching the retreat of the sun’s shadow upon a stairway). The shadow on the stairway went back up for the length of ten full steps.

Isaiah predicted that the treasures stored by Hezekiah would some day be carried to Babylon.

40: Isaiah stood boldly in public places, repeating: “I bring good tidings. Your God is coming to rule. He has no equal. Idols are far beneath Him. You, the people of Israel, Abraham’s descendants, are His chosen ones. ‘I,’ the Lord says to His people, ‘will help you. I will restore the land. Can other gods do this? Can your idols foretell the future as I have done?’

“‘I have aroused the might of the Persians. They will smite the kingdoms of the earth.

“‘I have ransomed you, My people of Israel, with Gentile lives. I am always with you. Everytime you abandoned your other gods and looked to Me alone, I have saved you. For you, I am bringing about the fall of Babylon. For you, I have built a highway through the wilderness for your return home.’”

Isaiah argued with the people. "Idol worshippers are absurd fools," he said. "The idols cannot move, think or talk! How could man bow before a god which cannot even act for itself?"

43: Behold my servant. I have put My spirit upon him; He shall judge the Gentiles.

God says to the people of Jerusalem: "Listen to My prophets. When I say of Cyrus, the Mede, that he will do as I say, be assured that he will do it." And to Cyrus: "Babylon is yours. I, the Lord, will break open its gates and allow you entry. I am at your side even though I am unknown to you. Babylon has mistreated My people; through you, I will punish them. I, the Lord God Jehovah, shall allow you to crush the Babylonian Kingdom and liberate My people.

"Awaken, My people. Prepare to free yourselves from your chains."

53: The Lord bore our suffering, anguish, and our sins. We strayed away from Him. He was brought as a lamb to the slaughter; He was taken from prison, tried, sentenced and killed, and not once did He protest. Who understood at that time that it was our sins for which He was dying, and our punishment which He was taking upon Himself? He was consigned to the death of a wicked man, though He had never hurt anyone.

Isaiah: "Fear not, Israel, though you have been like a barren woman, you shall have a multitude of children and many heirs. Your Maker shall be your Redeemer. He reclaims you and He vows to control His anger. No more punishment.

"He promises: 'Jerusalem will grow again. It will shine with jewels and gems as a model to all nations. I will defeat any nation who hereafter attacks it. Where once was desolation, briars and thorns, fruitful trees will abound.

"Blessed is he who commits no sin.

56: "'I include the Gentiles in My blessing when they acknowledge Me. I receive even the childless eunuchs. They have My assurance their name will last forever.

"I will accept the sacrifices of the Gentiles upon the altars in My Temple; My house shall be known as a House of Prayer for all nations. I will consider one's deeds above his adherence to religious ceremony.'"

Isaiah: "Your sons will rebuild your cities, assisted by the skill of foreign volunteers. Other nations will help. Jerusalem shall become the City of the Lord. Your descendants shall be fruitful and shall grow into a great nation. Cities shall rise from desolate ruins. Never again shall the City be pillaged or conquered by foreigners. Ye shall be named Priests of the Lord."

Who is this coming from Edom with clothes drenched in blood?

"I have taken vengeance upon the enemies of Israel," answered the Lord. "Again I have saved you, as I have on innumerable

occasions, including the time when I rescued you from Egypt.

“And, although I have allowed many of you, My people, to be destroyed, I did not exterminate your race. I saved a few who will inherit the land I promised them.

“Heaven is My throne and the earth is My footstool. I, Yahweh, will not accept the offerings of those who delight in their abominations. They bring upon themselves that which they fear most. My vengeance will be taken and Israel will be reborn. A lush and continuing abundance shall belong to Jerusalem. She shall receive the wealth of the Gentiles. My people shall declare My glory to the Gentiles. All mankind shall worship Me forever.

“And those who have offended Me shall suffer in the eternal fire.”

JEREMIAH

Comment

Jeremiah: Authorship is disputed. Baruch was supposed to have written Jeremiah's prophecies as he made them, around 607 B.C. Strong arguments have been presented that additions, interpolations, and even original authorship of most of the works by others at a much later date have been included.

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The following words from Jehovah to Jeremiah, the priest who lived near Jerusalem, were delivered during the period when Josiah, Jehoiakim, and Zedekiah were kings of Judah, including the time of the collapse of Jerusalem and the deportation of the people to Babylon.

During God's first visit to Jeremiah, He showed Jeremiah, through a vision, a pot of boiling water faced toward the north. "This signifies," He explained to Jeremiah, "that armies from the north will conquer Jerusalem. I will bring it about. I, Jehovah, will punish My people for neglecting Me and worshipping other gods."

God instructed Jeremiah to proclaim His messages to the people.

2: Jeremiah went forth, speaking the words which God had put into his mouth: "Israel has become a nation of slaves because they have forsaken God and worshipped idols. Fierce warriors will attack Jerusalem. It will do no good to seek Egypt's protection. They will turn against you. An alliance with Assyria won't help, either.

"Both Israel and Judah have behaved as whores. They have left their true God for worship of other gods. They make their sacrifices in the hills and fields (instead of in the Temple as Yahweh commanded). If only Israel would return to Jehovah, set aside their idols, and cleanse their minds and hearts of wickedness — oh, then, Jehovah would save them. Jehovah will hear in spite of what they have done.

"When Yahweh has had His harvest of His stubborn people, only a handful will have survived. Flee, people of Judah — flee, people of Benjamin, leave Jerusalem. The warriors of the north are just over the horizon. They will utterly destroy this town.

"You have been told, O Jerusalem. Unspeakable horrors await the occupants of this city. Jehovah says the people of this land shall be punished for their worship of the idols. The time is growing short. Even now, it may be too late for the offering of sacrifices and burning of incense. The cruel and powerful armies draw ever nearer."

7: Then God sent Jeremiah to the Temple gate and told him to tell the Judeans:

"Hear the Lord! It is not too late. You can change your ways now and God will be with you. Do not be deluded into believing that since God's Temple is here, God will not let it be destroyed. The Temple alone will not protect you. You must cleanse your mind and quit your acts of crime against each other.

"But if you continue your worship of the other gods, including the queen of heaven, you will feel the fury of His anger. The enemy shall overrun the land of Judah.

"I weep for the people of the land of Judah. Their cities are abandoned mounds of rubble, and they grope about empty streets in caution and fear. They would not obey the voice of their Lord. Now they shall be punished by the Lord. The fields of Judah will be strewn with their bodies. The northern armies shall march through the land of Judah, leaving the remains for the jackals."

(Jehovah contracted with the ancestors of the men of Judah. The agreement itself provided that one who does not comply with it shall be cursed.)

"Jeremiah," God ordered, "go to the people in every village, to every farm, and family. Remind them that they have not kept their contract with Me. Remind them of the terrors which I promised to bring upon them for their failure to heed. Tell them that I threaten them with disaster because they burn sacrifices to Baal upon every street in Jerusalem."

The men of Anathoth plotted to kill Jeremiah, but Jehovah warned him, and Jeremiah was able to avoid the ambush. Seeking revenge, Jeremiah petitioned Yahweh, and Yahweh replied: "The village of Anathoth shall feel My wrath. Their men shall die by the sword and their children will die of hunger. Not one citizen of Anathoth, Jeremiah, shall survive."

Jeremiah complained to the Lord about the bandits and looters from neighboring lands who probed Judah's ruins. The Lord promised: "I have left the house of Israel and delivered her to her enemies; but as for Israel's neighbors who now pillage the homes and make claim upon the lands I have given My people, I will evict them; still, if they form families among My people and forsake the worship of Baal, I will preserve them. The people of Judah shall be returned to live with them."

14: Jeremiah said the Lord made the following statements concerning the drought:

"Judah cries out for water for grass, her cattle, and crops. Her people have not followed My ways. Their prophets offer them false visions. I am placing upon them the evil they deserve. Considering what My people have done and how they have ignored My pleas, I would not help them now even though Moses and Samuel were here with them. I will surrender their wealth to their enemies; I will cause them to be led away as slaves to a foreign land."

Jeremiah begged: "God, I have spoken in Your behalf and have suffered for it. I am constantly persecuted. Don't allow me to be killed. I have not sinned against You. I feasted not, but fasted alone. Do not fail me now."

The Lord answered: "You are My spokesman. I will save you."

Later, the Lord was again talking to Jeremiah:

16: "Do not beget children in Jerusalem," He said, "lest they be killed or tortured. Do not celebrate with the people, for they will be punished for their revelry and false pleasures."

"O, Throne of Glory," Jeremiah entreated, "the people jeer me when I make predictions, even though I tell them that it is Your word and not mine. Use Your dreadful powers upon my persecutors. Destroy them completely."

Jeremiah continued his proclamation of Jehovah's message at the gates of Jerusalem: "If you keep God's commandments," Jeremiah preached, "the nation will not fall, nor will it ever fail. But if you don't, invading armies will besiege this city, and while it is besieged, those trapped inside will starve. They will eat their friends, even their own children. The walls and edifices of the town will burn. Jerusalem will be stamped out."

Again Jeremiah reported to Jehovah:

"When I spoke to my people, they proposed to murder me. Help me, O Lord, from the pit into which they would cast me. Take Your revenge against those who contend with me. Bring a plague upon them, and let them die, deprive their widows of their children, and let the children starve. Don't forgive them, O Lord, their threats and plots against me."

One day Jeremiah stood at the Temple court and boldly repeated that the time would soon come that they would eat their own children in this besieged city. He was arrested, whipped, and then imprisoned near the Temple until the next day. No sooner had he been released than he shouted back to his jailers: "Nevertheless, what I have said will come to pass. Judah will fall to the King of Babylon. Jerusalem will be looted."

Once back in the presence of Jehovah, Jeremiah wept. "You deceived me, my Lord. I am contemptible in the sight of my friends and neighbors because of the words of doom You have given me to speak. I am the subject of their scorn; they look upon me with disgust and disdain.

"You are with me and I know they cannot beat me down. Praise the Lord!

"Oh, but life is miserable. I wish that I had not been born to witness the events which surround me."

21: King Zedekiah asked Jeremiah for help against the Babylonian siege. Jeremiah told him it was no use, that the Babylonians would march into the city, capture Zedekiah and sack Jerusalem. "If you want to save your life," urged Jeremiah,

“surrender to the Chaldeans.

“Be upright. Avoid wrongdoing. Stop the shedding of innocent blood. Do no violence to orphans and widows and the Lord will once again salvage this nation and restore to it the glory it knew in David’s time. But if you do not heed me, Jerusalem will be razed.”

Jeremiah sat at the gates and preached: “Woe to King Jehoahaz who was carried to Egypt, and there will die. Woe to King Jehoiakim, who shall be slain in Jerusalem, hauled out of the city gates and buried like a dead ass. Woe to Coniah, who shall be deported to Babylon and never return to Jerusalem. His seed shall not prosper.”

23: For God says that He will visit evils upon the princes of the people. Then God will gather together the remnant of His flock from those places to which He, Jehovah, had driven them, and return them, where they shall be fruitful and increase.

For the Lord says that the day will come when He will cause a Righteous Branch to spring from David’s line to rule wisely so that Judah and Israel shall live in safety.

Many of the prophets in Jerusalem predicted that the city would be saved. The people chided Jeremiah for his constant prophecies of gloom. They accused him of being on the side of the enemy.

Jeremiah replied, “The Lord says for you to disregard what the prophets are saying concerning your salvation. The disaster will come! Prophets who encourage you falsely shall be punished.

“The Lord showed me, in a vision, two baskets of figs, one bad and one good. ‘The captive Judeans in the land of the Chaldeans,’ He said, ‘represents the good basket of figs. I shall care for them during their exile, and restore them to the land from which they have been taken. Zedekiah and the people remaining with him in Jerusalem, and those who fled to Egypt, like the basket of bad figs, are already so wicked and bad that they are beyond recovery. I will destroy them with the sword, famine and plague.’”

Sayeth the Lord to His people: “Because you have not heard My words, I am going to send Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon against you. The few who are not exterminated shall be deported as slaves to Babylon. There they shall remain for seventy years. Then,” sayeth Jehovah, “I will punish Nebuchadnezzar and devastate his land.”

The Lord’s voice thunders from Zion; the earth trembles; His voice carries to the ends of the earth. He shall smite the wicked of all nations with a sword. Their bodies shall litter the land throughout the world, as nothing more than dung upon the ground.

26: When Jehoiakim became king, Jeremiah, from the Temple court, delivered this message from God: “People of Judah, if you do not obey Me and listen to the prophets which I have sent you,

My wrath shall descend upon this city. It shall become an object of contempt to the world."

The priests, prophets, and congregation, incensed by Jeremiah's words, seized him, and proposed that he be condemned to death. The people debated. Ahiekam used his influence to save Jeremiah's life. (The prophet, Urijah, who, like Jeremiah, had urged his countrymen to surrender to the enemy was not so fortunate. The people demanded his execution and the king beheaded him.)

When Zedekiah was king, Jeremiah brought these words of the Lord to the messengers of Edom, Moab, Ammon, Tyre and Zidon: "I, the Lord, made the earth and I therefore give it to whomsoever I choose. I now give all the land to my servant, Nebuchadnezzar — all nations shall serve him. If any nation refuse to yield to him, I, the Lord, will punish that nation with starvation, plague or sword. Disregard the advice of your prophets who tell you to resist the King of Babylon. They are false." Jeremiah told Zedekiah, King of Judah: "You need not die. You need not be banished. Nebuchadnezzar will leave you and your people on your own soil if you do not resist him. Bow down before the King of Babylon."

Hananiah, the prophet, prophesied, in the presence of Jeremiah and the officials of the court, that the yoke of Babylon would be broken; that Jerusalem could hold off Nebuchadnezzar.

Jeremiah rebutted: "No," he said, "Jehovah says that Hananiah is a false prophet. He will die within the year." Hananiah died before the year ended.

Jeremiah prophesied to the people in exile, by means of a letter, that after seventy years, the exiled would be returned to Jerusalem. "In the meantime," he instructed, "you should take care of your own, be loyal to Babylon, provide for yourselves, and multiply."

"Those remaining in Jerusalem," he wrote, "will be punished by the King of Babylon and by plagues."

Jeremiah told them the Lord had given this promise: "I will rebuild every city of Jacob's clan. I will punish their oppressors. It is true that I scattered Israel, but I shall gather them again and there shall be joy in Ephraim and in Ramah. I will restore the people to the land of Judah and Judah and Israel shall be joined together in the worship of Me. I will make a new covenant with them."

During the Babylonian siege, Jeremiah continued to predict Zedekiah's end, so Zedekiah imprisoned him. While in prison, Jeremiah bought land and had the purchase papers enclosed in an earthen jar and hidden, saying that sometime in the future his people would be freed and his right to the land would follow.

From behind prison walls, Jeremiah's word came to the people:

"God says that the houses of this city, including the royal palace, will be razed. Later, the Lord will heal the wounds of the people and restore them to their homeland."

34: Jeremiah said the Lord told him: "Jerusalem will be burned to the ground. Zedekiah will die a peaceful death."

The Lord said, "In the seventh year, you were to set free your Hebrew slaves, who are, after all, your brothers. You did not. Therefore, I will make you subject to the sword and give you famine and plague, and you shall become a thing of contempt for all nations."

36: The Lord told Jeremiah to write upon a scroll the words He spoke to him. So Jeremiah employed Baruch, a scribe, to write, as he directed, the words he, Jeremiah, was receiving from the Lord. Baruch obeyed, then presented what he had written to King Jehoiakim's court. The King, after reading it, burned it up. Baruch and Jeremiah went into hiding.

On Jehovah's command, Jeremiah repeated the warnings and Baruch wrote them down. In the scroll, the Lord promised punishment of Jehoiakim, the king, for his burning of the first scroll.

While the Chaldean army was besieging Jerusalem, Jeremiah attempted to leave Jerusalem. He was captured and accused of going over to the Chaldeans. Although Jeremiah denied the charge of his countrymen that he was a traitor, he was beaten, imprisoned, and then brought before the king.

Zedekiah asked if Jeremiah had heard from the Lord, and Jeremiah told him that indeed he had. He advised Zedekiah to surrender. He warned that Zedekiah would become a captive of the King of Babylon, irregardless, but if he surrendered, the city would be spared.

Jeremiah was returned to prison. Many officers of the king's court urged that the king order Jeremiah's execution because Jeremiah had attempted to discourage the people in their defense of the city. Some of those who had been guarding Jeremiah placed him into a muddy bottomed well, expecting him to die of hunger. When the king heard of it, he had Jeremiah retrieved from the pit. Again and again, Jeremiah urged his king and countrymen to give up.

Jeremiah was still in jail when Jerusalem capitulated. Zedekiah and some of his officers fled, but were overtaken, captured and brought to Riblah, field headquarters of Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon. There, while Zedekiah watched, the king's men slew Zedekiah's sons and the officials of Judah. Then they tore out Zedekiah's eyes, placed him in chains, and transported him to Babylon. (Shortly thereafter he was executed.)

The walls and houses of Jerusalem were razed. The people, except for the poorest, weakest, and most helpless, were chained

and marched to Babylon.

Jeremiah was given special treatment. He was freed from prison on direct orders of the King of Babylon. He was invited to go with the invaders back to their homeland and promised that he would receive a reward, special attention and care if he would go. They gave him food and gifts and, at his request, appointed his friend, Gedaliah, as puppet governor over the land of Judah. Jeremiah elected to remain in Jerusalem.

Gedaliah was assassinated shortly thereafter. The people, afraid because some of them had conspired to kill the puppet governor, came to Jeremiah for advice as to whether to run or stay. Jeremiah asked the Lord and said that the Lord answered: "Tell the people that if they will stay in the land, I will build them up. Do not be afraid that vengeance will be taken. Do not flee to Egypt. I, Myself, will punish you if you go to Egypt. There you will suffer a death of terror."

When Jeremiah finished, some of the officers accused him of lying. They organized some of the people there and departed to Egypt, taking Jeremiah and Baruch with them.

Jeremiah then predicted, through God, that Nebuchadnezzar would invade and devastate Egypt.

46: Jeremiah received this message from the Lord concerning Egypt following the defeat of Pharaoh Necho at Carchemish. "Her cities of Noph, Tahpanhes, and other forts shall be attacked and harassed." The Philistines: "Tyre and Sidon will be laid waste by the Chaldean invaders." Moab: "Moab will be ravaged, her wealth pillaged, and her survivors left in shame and tears." Ammon: "Ammon will become a wasteland, uninhabited." Edom: "Edom shall be punished and her people shall flee as the Chaldeans continue their victorious march." Damascus: "The people of Damascus will become wandering refugees; the homes and buildings of her city will be burned." Arabia: "Kedar of Arabia shall fight, surrender, and become a subject of the Babylonian king." Elam: "The people of Elam shall be scattered throughout all the nations."

Babylon: "And finally Babylon herself shall be overrun by armies from the north; Bel, Merodach, and her other idols shall be broken and ruined. Babylon shall be plundered, its women raped, its children killed or enslaved, and the city laid to waste. Thus, the vengeance of God will be satisfied.

"After God has taken His vengeance upon the King of Babylon, as He took it upon the King of Assyria, He will bring His people of Israel back to their homeland.

"The Chaldeans shall fall to the people from the north (the Medes); even now a sword hangs over their head. The destruction of Babylon by sword, arrow, and stone will repay its citizens for their wrongdoing. So sayeth the Lord God of Israel, Lord of Hosts,

God of retribution.”

52: Historical note: After Nebuchadnezzar had captured Zedekiah, gouged out his eyes, and committed him to a Babylon prison for life, he entered Jerusalem and burned the palace and the houses of the city. His Chaldeans dismantled the Temple's pillars of brass and its sea of brass and carried them, with other treasures, to Babylon, along with the utensils which were used by the priests in their Temple duties. Altogether, Nebuchadnezzar deported 4,600 Judeans to Babylon. The Babylonian king released Jehoiachin, exiled king, from prison in the thirty-seventh year of captivity, allowed him a daily ration, set him above the other captive kings in Babylon, and provided for him the remainder of his life.

LAMENTATIONS

Comment

Background: Jerusalem was a remarkably strong fortress. It remained impregnable to the assaults of the Hebrews until David entered by way of its water system and wrested its possession from the Jebusites in the 11th Century, B.C. Thereafter, from time to time, the town withstood attacks from perennial hostile neighbors. The powerful Assyrians swept through the Northern and Southern Kingdoms in 721 B.C. and laid siege to it, but Jerusalem did not fall.

Finally, in 606 B.C., Babylonians besieged the city. Jeremiah warned the king and his council that Jerusalem could not withstand the assaults of the fierce Chaldeans upon its gates and urged them to surrender. The king's advisers argued that Jerusalem had been threatened many times before and had not yielded. Jeremiah plead with them repeatedly, but they would not listen.

Wave after wave of Babylonian might was hurled against Jerusalem walls and they gave way. The conquerors entered the city, looting, pillaging, raping, ravaging, destroying everything in their path and indiscriminantly slaying the living. Not only Judah's young men, but also women and children, lay mangled and butchered on all the streets and byways of the town. Toppled stone barricades and the fallen walls of homes and businesses cluttered the avenues in piles of stone and debris. Bodies and blood were scattered among the wreckage.

It was dusk, nearly dark, and Jeremiah squatted on the road. Dressed in sackcloth, eyes red with weeping, beard caked with dirt and tears, Jeremiah stared intensely into the dirt and cried:

* * * * *

"Now the beauty of Jerusalem is spoiled and she lies ruined, helpless and abandoned. She is plundered; there is nothing left of her. There is no one to answer her cries for help.

"The Lord has demolished our habitations. His Temple is gone — ashes mark the place where it stood. In His anger, He has beaten down His people. They lie mute, shocked and terrified at the intensity of His wrath against them, for He has treated them as an enemy.

"I weep; but weeping does not restore Judah. Old people sit on the ground like mummies, covered in sackcloth with dust on their heads. Dying children cry vainly for food. Their mothers stare dully into space. All of Jerusalem is derided, mocked by foreigners who pass by. Why, oh Lord, have You killed Your own people, Your priests, Your prophets, Your children? Even the helpless and tired have been crushed beneath Your feet!

“Who would have believed that the fortress of Jerusalem was not invincible to any enemy? Only You could have done it. For You are great.

“Shall I set aside my bitterness against You? Your compassion is never ended. We, Your people, have sinned and You have punished us. We look to You that You might save us. There is no one left but You.

“Surely Your anger has been satisfied. Our women have been violated, our rulers executed, our elders scorned, and our young men enslaved. Our neighbors gloat over our misfortune. There is nothing left for us but tears.

“You, oh Lord, remain the same forever. Do not forget us. This is our hope. Help us again.

“Still Your wrath, O Lord. We are still Your people.”

EZEKIEL

Comment

590 B.C. Some claim that the whole of the book was written by Ezekiel; it has been suggested that he wrote not more than one-seventh and that much of it was written after his time.

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1: "In the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin, I, Ezekiel, in Chaldea, saw this vision: A large cloud approached me, and as it neared, I saw streaks of fire and lightning in and through it. In the cloud, surrounded by fire, were four living creatures; each had a four-sided face, one side, the appearance of a man, one, a lion, one, the features of an ox, and the fourth, the profile of an eagle; each had four wings under which were human hands; each had straight legs with feet shaped as the hooves of a calf, shining as polished bronze.

"On the ground, next the creatures, were four wheels and in each wheel was another wheel, so that each wheel could move in any direction from a standing position. The wheels appeared to be made of brightly colored gems or stones, and from roundabout their hubs, numerous eyes gaped.

"Above the creatures' outstretched wings (the noise was awesome when their wings moved) was a crystal sheet upon which sat a sapphire throne. On the throne, in glowing golden fire, was a man-like form, bright as brass from the loins up, radiant with fire from the loins down.

"His voice boomed out to me: 'Man, I want you to take My Word to the Israelites. They are rebellious and they will not listen; they will not understand, but you must warn them anyway.' The fiery form stretched out a hand and gave to me a scroll. At His command, I ate it. It was sweet, like honey. He directed me to be stubborn and persistent in speaking with the rebellious people, the Israelites.

3: "Then I was lifted (I could hear the flapping of the creatures' wings) and carried aloft, and finally set down at Tel-abib, where I delivered His message to the exiles. Then the Lord ordered me to enter the plain. I did so, and I was met there by the same apparition which I had seen before in my vision.

"The Spirit said to me: 'I am causing you to be stricken so that you cannot move. Nor will you be able to speak except when I give you the words to say. You will portray the siege of Jerusalem by means of placed symbols. You will lay on one side or the other to signify the wickedness of Israel or Judah, as the case may be. You will fast, eating bread and water, and the bread will be baked with human dung.'

"I pled with the Lord: 'Please do not cause me to defile myself by

making me use human dung.' He relented and gave me permission to use cow dung instead. He further instructed that I should demonstrate the scattering of the Israelites by cutting the hair off my head and chin, burning it, and throwing one-third of the ashes to the wind.

"The Lord said: 'Jerusalem will feel My fury and My anger. My judgments will be executed against those who have ignored the warnings of My prophets. They will suffer by famine, plague and sword. I will slay the Israelites in front of their idols, and then destroy the idols and their hill-shrines. A few of them will survive and be taken into captivity. They shall know one disaster after another. From the four corners of the earth I will seal their doom. None will escape. They shall feel My rage and the afflictions which they shall receive shall be so severe that they will know that they were given by Me, the Lord.'

8: "Later, a man of brassy torso and fire-enshrouded waist came to me, picked me up by the hair, and whisked me to the spot where stands the image of jealousy in Jerusalem. I witnessed the worship of idol reptiles, beasts, and abominable images by the Israelite elders in the Temple itself. I saw women crying over the idol, Tammuz, and men prostrating themselves eastward in worship of the rising sun.

"Then I saw six men, armed as executioners, coming down the north gate road. One of them, carrying writing materials, led the others through Jerusalem, marking the foreheads of those who cried out against the evil ways of the people. Those marked were spared, but the executioners killed everyone else, men, women and children.

"I pleaded with God: 'Do You have to kill all the Israelites? There are so few left in Jerusalem.' And He replied: 'Israel and Judah have been full of wickedness. I do not pity them — I will not spare them.' Then, still sitting on His throne above the four-faced cherubims, He commanded the leader of the six men to enter the fiery cloud, seize some of its fire and toss it over the city.

"A Spirit took me to the elders of the city. I prophesied, as the Lord had commanded. 'You are doomed,' I told the elders, 'you will die by the sword.' One of the elders, Pelatiah, fell dead while I was prophesying.

"Then I was again lifted up and returned to my home with the exiles in Chaldea. I explained to them what the Lord had shown me.

12: Later — "The Lord told me to show the people (by removing my belongings from a side door during the night) that Jerusalem would soon be overrun and its occupants carried off into captivity. I prophesied that their leader would be carried to Babylon, blind, to die. I told them that they need not hope God's prophesy of doom would be delayed. I informed them that prophets who said

otherwise were false.

"When the elders of a land do not obey God," I warned, "He will punish them. When the people rebel, God sends plagues and famine upon them."

"Although Noah, Daniel and Job were living in Jerusalem, I would still destroy the city," Jehovah told Ezekiel. "They could save only themselves. The people will be burned as one would burn a useless vine."

"The Lord told me that Jerusalem was much like the abandoned infant child who was picked up, bandaged, nursed, fed, tended, and with care and love nourished and reared to maturity, becoming a beautiful woman. She was anointed with oil, furnished beautiful silk robes, sandals, perfume, jewelry, ornaments of gold and silver, and made a queen.

"Then she offered herself to any and all, to whomever passed by. They drained her of her beauty and left her a harlot because she forgot what she was, and who had befriended her. 'Jerusalem,' says the Lord, 'you are a whore. I will bring all your lovers and place you on trial before them. They will strip your clothing from your body and assault you. When they have finished their abuse of you, they will butcher you with their swords.

"Then I will lay My anger to rest!

"Your elder sister was Samaria," God continued, "Your younger sister was Sodom. Samaria made the same mistakes that you made, but Sodom's sin was pride. Your sins are even more abominable than the sins of Samaria and Sodom. Still, the cities of Sodom and Samaria will be rebuilt, and even you shall be received by Me again.

"I will carry the King of Jerusalem to Babylon and mete out My judgment to him there. He has broken faith with Me."

18: "Here is what the Lord told me," reported Ezekiel. "The righteous man shall not suffer for the sins of his son, nor the son for the wrongs of his father, but each man shall be judged on his own account. If a wicked man repent, give up his sinful ways, and lives righteously, he shall survive, and his offenses shall be forgiven. Nevertheless, should a righteous man backslide into sin, he shall die. His past righteousness shall be of no benefit to him. Repent ye, therefore, of your iniquity. Give yourself a new spirit and live.

"The Ammonites, the land of Judah and even Jerusalem will crumble before Babylon's punishing armies.

23: "The Lord said to me: 'Once there were two daughters, Aholah (Samaria) and Aholibah (Jerusalem). Aholah first whored, defiling herself with her Assyrian lovers and their idols, continuing her whorish manners which had been hers in Egypt —

"I, the Lord, gave My daughter to her lovers. When they had

finished with her, they pierced her with sword.

“Aholibah did not learn by what her sister had done. The Assyrians appealed to her, too, and she was defiled by some of the handsome young officers. But she did not stop. She shamelessly invited the officers of Chaldea (Babylon) to her side, and with them pursued her life of lust, sharing her bed, fornicating with them, and consorting with their male images. It is My decree that she (Jerusalem) be used by her Babylonian lovers, attacked and maimed. She will realize her lust is a thing of horror, but too late. Naked, she shall fall by the sword, the culmination of a life repugnant even to her.”

When Ezekiel's wife died, the Lord told him not to mourn, leave his lips uncovered, and wear sandals and head protection. He did this, and when his neighbors inquired as to his actions, he said, “As the Lord has commanded, this is a sign that the Israelites will not mourn the fall of Jerusalem.”

25: The Lord said, “Man, prophesy that the Ammonites will fall to the armies of Babylon, and their city, Rabbah, will be devastated; that Moab, also, shall fall; that Edom, too, shall feel the edge of the Chaldean sword (Judah shall be avenged for Edom's slurs and attacks upon it when it lay weak and helpless). And,” continued the Lord, “through Nebuchadnezzar, I will take vengeance upon the Philistines — they will know that I am God.

“Tell the world that the walls of Tyre shall fall, leaving her an easy spoil for all nations. My judgment against Zidon shall be executed; she will suffer sword and plague. All will know that I am the Lord.

29: “Egypt's Pharaoh bragged that it was he who made the Nile. Such boasts stir My wrath. Egypt shall suffer by the Babylonian sword. I will make it a desolate wasteland to lie uninhabited for forty years. Thereafter, I shall revive it, but it shall remain a small kingdom among the nations. By sword, Babylon shall lay low Assyria, Elam, Meshech, Tubal, and Edom.

“I shall gather the Israelites from the nations where they have been scattered, and return them to their native soil, the land which I gave to my servant, Jacob. There they shall live in peace, as I execute My judgments on their neighbors. Then they will understand that I am God.”

33: “In the twelfth year of our captivity, I, Ezekiel, received word that Jerusalem had fallen. The Lord at that time restored my voice, saying: ‘Your fellow Jews make joke of your prophecies out of your hearing; they will sit and listen to you, but their applause is pretended. Do not mind — the time will come when they will realize that you were a true prophet.

“‘Tell them that I have not abandoned them. As a shepherd searches out the lost sheep from his flock, so I will rescue them from remote places where they have been driven in dark days past. I will bring them home, to Jerusalem, to Israel.

“There I will set my shepherd, David, as their shepherd, to care for His people. I will live with them and be their God and David shall be a prince. I will covenant with them that they shall live in peace at last.”

The Lord commanded Ezekiel that he should prophesy Seir's doom. Ezekiel relayed God's message: “Seir shall end, bathed in blood, as punishment to its peoples for their gloating over Israel's downfall. The Edomites, who also rejoiced at Jerusalem's helplessness before the Babylonians, shall feel God's hand of retribution.”

Jehovah related to His prophet: “My people shall never again have to endure the sneers and jeers of Gentile peoples. They shall have a new heart, a clean body, and a renewed spirit. They will become fruitful and grow strong. The land will be farmed, the cities rebuilt; all the world shall know that I, the Lord of Israel, am God.”

On the Lord's command, Ezekiel wrote the word “Judah” on one tile and “Israel” on another, and bound them together, signifying the promise of the Lord that Judah and Israel would be returned from exile and joined again. “I, the Lord, will make them one nation,” He told him. “They shall be My people. I will be their God and My servant, David, shall be their king.”

38: Once, as Jehovah and Ezekiel sat talking, Jehovah looked northward and foretold: “See ye Magog where lives Gog, the ruler of Rosh, Meshech, and Tubal. As the Israelites occupy their new nation in peace, these evil peoples will come from the north, a mighty army upon horseback, bound for the defenseless villages of the Israelite people.

“And then I, the Lord, will demonstrate My strength. I shall make a great earthquake, destroying mountains and shaking the face of the earth so that all creatures will feel it. I will send down rain, hailstones, fire, and brimstone upon the attacking armies of Gog. I will execute my judgments of bloodshed and plague.

“In this way, many nations will know Me and My might.

“And you, Ezekiel,” said the Lord, “shall prophesy what I am going to do to God. Foretell that I will send fire on Magog. The corpses of the army of Gog shall be so numerous that it will require the Israelites seven months to bury them.

“I will show my love for all of Israel, the descendants of Jacob.”

40: One day, Ezekiel announced to his friends: “In the twenty-fifth year of our exile, in a vision, God brought me to Israel on a mountain overlooking the city. There a figure of brass, holding a ball of flaxen thread and a measuring stick, picked a particular place in the city and measured out the dimensions for the construction of a Temple. The Temple included a Holy Place and the Most Holy Place, with carvings of cherubims and palm trees.

“And when, in my vision, the Temple was built, the Lord came,

lifted me, and carried me with Him into the inner-court. He told me that this Temple was the place of His throne, where He would live forever among the Israelites.

"He instructed me to tell the Israelites about the Temple, what I had seen and heard. He ordered that only the Levitical priests of the Zadok family would preside in the Temple; that these priests should purify the altar by sacrificing a bull, a male goat, and a ram for seven days, smearing the blood of the animals on the altar horns and about the Temple grounds."

The Lord commanded: "Neither the uncircumcised nor the Gentile shall enter My house; the Israelites are charged with the responsibility of preventing the Temple from becoming defiled by the entry of such Gentile or uncircumcised person.

"The Zadok priests shall dress in linen (no wool), with turbans on their head and linen breeches on their body. They shall not shave their heads, but shall clip their hair. They shall not drink wine prior to entry of the inner-court. When a priest marries, it shall be to a virgin Jew or the widow of a priest. He shall not defile himself by contact with dead persons (except his kin), own no property, and eat no animal dying a natural death. The priests must change clothes between courts. They shall not take their clothing from the inner-court into the outer-court because the holy power might be transferred from the clothing to the people.

"The people shall make their regular sacrifices, celebrate the Passover, and submit offerings. The animals offered shall have no blemish."

47: The Temple faced East. The Lord showed Ezekiel a stream running from the Temple which, starting from a small spring, became a swollen river as it rushed eastward through the land. The waters, sweet and cool, were the waters of life everlasting, with never dying fruit laden trees along its banks.

The borders of the land within which the twelve tribes of Israel were to reenter and repossess were as follows: on the north, from the Great Sea through Hethlon, Zedad, Sibraim (between Damascus and Hamath). On the east, along the boundary of Jordan from Gilead and Huran. On the south, from Tamar westward to the Great Sea.

The land shall be divided among the twelve tribes. The priests shall be given their share, and the Levites, who assist the priests, shall be given their share from the strips of the land here awarded to the various tribes. The gates of the city shall be named after the twelve tribes of Israel. Hereafter the city shall be known as "The Lord Is There".

Comment

Following the deportation, the style and substance of the texts of the Bible, from Ezekiel through the New Testament, changes.

Within these new pages angels, as God's helpers or hideous executioners, appear. Some of them even have names. No explanation is given as to their origin — the writers take for granted that the reader is knowledgeable of the assumed fact.

Through the remainder of The Book, a creature called Satan begins to make regular appearances in his own image. The chapters commence to speak of "Abyss", "demons", people "possessed" of devils, "spirits", and the forces of evil led by Satan in a war against the Most High.

Did Judaism experience a modification of its views at this time? In Babylonia, to what influences of culture and religion, if any, were the Judeans exposed? Let's pause a moment to examine the world to which they were removed.

For the most part, the Babylonians left the Jews alone. Other than their work assignment in service to the Chaldeans, Yahweh's people lived, clan-like, in villages near their master's home, raised their families within their clan, practiced their own religion, and went their separate way. Their captors worshipped idols of nature, principally the Sun, regularly sacrificing their animals in temples (much like Solomon's) dedicated to Bel, the Sun-God, a custom with which Judeans had been familiar for generations.

However, in the 70th year of Jewish exile, Persia took charge of a large share of the known world, including the land of the Chaldeans. The Jews were freed. Some stayed, some moved into Persia to serve their liberators, and some returned to Jerusalem and Judah. From time to time, within the two hundred years following, the Persians dominated their world, and wherever they went, the Persians took with them a religion called —

Zoroasterism.

According to legend, the Prophet Zoroaster began his ministry when he was thirty years old. In a vision he was escorted into Heaven and there taught the good religion. His followers' sacred scripture (the Avesta) narrate his visit with the Supreme God on Mount Sabelan, where Zoroaster received God's commandments from God Himself. These ordinances instructing man how he should live, together with the Wise One's explanation of the beginning and ending of creation, were set down in the Avesta, the Holy Book which the followers of Zoroaster say is God's word.

As prophets do, Zoroaster returned from the mountaintop and taught the new religion (the good life) to anyone who would listen.

"As day is divided by light and darkness, so also is the world split between good and bad," he told them, "and since all creation is inherently good, its maker, the Supreme God, is the god of good."

He cannot do evil."

His listeners asked, "Whence then came evil, which exists everywhere? Didn't the Supreme God make wickedness, too?"

Zoroaster replied, "The Creator, being good, could not have created bad. Evil is the device of a mighty sovereign angel."

Zoroaster called the Supreme God "AhuraMazda" and the angel of evil "Ahriman". Through the Avesta, he and his followers taught:

That AhuraMazda created the world in six periods; first, he created the immortals (the seven images — his arch-angels), then the Yazatas (the multitude of lesser, ministering angels), then the sky, water, earth, trees, plants, and animals, and man, in that order.

The one wise Lord, AhuraMazda, is perfect in every detail, having seven aspects: spirit, mind, truth, dignity, devotion, integrity, and immortality. These aspects are represented by images or angels which sit on seven golden thrones surrounding the one Lord, AhuraMazda, in heaven as he reigns among a multitude of angels and heavenly host.

There will be life everlasting for the righteous and punishment to the wicked even beyond the grave. Man has an earthly body and heavenly spirit; three days after death, the spirit will ascend from the body.

Demons live within and without the bodies of men; there are thousands of them everywhere. Ahriman is their leader.

Man stores up credits or demerits based upon deed and thought during his lifetime; at his death, the Book of Life is consulted by a savior, who renders judgment. The Abyss of Hell awaits wrongdoers, although redemption is possible. Heaven, above, with AhuraMazda, is the reward for the good.

The world's existence is 12,000 years, divided into four periods, or "times", of 3,000 years each. The first 3,000 years was the period of original creation; the second 3,000 years were tranquil under AhuraMazda; the third period was one of conflict, first Ahriman, then the Supreme, having the upper hand in dealing with man or controlling the universe.

The final period will itself be divided into three parts of 1,000 years. At the end of each 1,000 years a savior will appear to fight or defeat the forces of evil. At the end of each term, there will be "signs", like storm, plague, famine, drought, sun standing still, moon dripping blood, and other portents of the sky. Finally, the world will end in a fierce battle as a Savior defeats Ahriman and his demons and commits them into the Abyss forever.

The last Messiah will raise the dead. He will render judgment; perfection will prevail throughout the world. The righteous shall pass through a purification process into heaven.

From 550 to 350 B.C., Zoroasterism flourished throughout a vast Persian Empire. Kings Cyrus, Darius, and Ar-ta-xerxes were followers. Its tenets were preached through Mithraism (later discussed) well into the Christian era. Its claim to be the answer to the "Good Life" was, naturally, supported by many myths, some of which were:

The coming of Zoroaster was predicted by the prophets.

His birth was announced by showering stars.

He was born to a fifteen year old virgin. His mother was informed of her pregnancy by angels of the Supreme Being.

The High Priest, fearful of a loss of power and prestige, attempted to kill the infant Zoroaster. He placed the child in a blazing furnace, but Zoroaster sang and danced in the midst of the flames, unharmed.

He was tempted by the devil, but stood firm.

Zoroaster and/or AhuraMazda left some of his seed in a lake. A fifteen year old virgin swimming in the lake became impregnated and a savior (Messiah — a God) was born to her. This was to happen three times, at the end of each 1,000 year period. The first savior, Aushedor (Righteousness) has already come and gone, having shown mankind something of the perfection that will someday come. He has consigned Ahriman and the demons to the Abyss below the mountain, but they will escape to confront the final savior on judgment day.

(One of the saviors was Mithra, and the worship of him in later years became a religion in itself which competed with Christianity for survival in a Roman-Greco world. His coming was awaited by his followers in the pre-Christian era.)

Did the captive Jews adopt any of their master's creed? Were the seeds of Christian Dogma sown here some 600 years before the time of the apostles?

DANIEL

Comment

Is the author Daniel? Students of the writing would give it a second century, B.C., date and not the sixth century period in which scripture places Daniel's life.

* * * * *

1: Early in the reign of Jehoiakim, Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon captured Jerusalem and took many slaves, deporting them to Babylon. Four of those captured were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, and when they were delivered to the eunuchs of the royal household for training, they were given the names, respectively, of Belteshazzar, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. After their orientation, they were brought into the court for service to Nebuchadnezzar.

The King was impressed with Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego. When he called upon them for advice, he found their knowledge, logic, and communication superior to that of his magicians and astrologers. Daniel served the Babylonian court until the first year of King Cyrus.

Shortly after Daniel and his friends had begun their tenure in the King's court, the King had a dream but he could not recall what it was. He demanded of the wise men of his kingdom that they not only interpret the dream, but also tell him what it was. They could not — and he considered having them executed.

Daniel asked the Lord what kind of dream the King had experienced, and its interpretation, and the Lord told him. So Daniel, being brought before the King, informed the King of his dream, and its meaning, as follows:

"Great King Nebuchadnezzar, you saw an image with head of gold, arms and breasts of silver, stomach and thighs of bronze, legs of iron, and feet a clay-iron alloy. Then a stone from a mountain struck the image's feet, shattering them. The image collapsed and its pieces were blown away and scattered by the wind. There remained only the stone from the mountain which grew, and expanded, and grew until it covered the earth.

"The image in the dream represents four kingdoms," Daniel continued, "the head of gold being the kingdom of Nebuchadnezzar. The other three kingdoms, the silver, the bronze and the iron, are inferior to the kingdom of Babylon, but, nevertheless, each, in turn, shall replace it. They, too, will be finally swept away. The feet represent intermarriage between royalty of the nations in attempts to strengthen their kingdoms. This will fail. As iron and clay is weak (how easily the feet of the image were shattered), so also are treaties based on intermarriage.

"During the reign of the four kings, the Most High, Himself, will

establish a kingdom which shall never be destroyed."

King Nebuchadnezzar fell on his face before Daniel, worshipping him, declaring "Your God is, indeed, God of gods." He promoted Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego to the highest positions of government in the entire province of Babylon.

Nebuchadnezzar constructed a golden image, ninety feet high, and decreed that upon command the people should worship the idol, prostrating themselves before it. Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego paid no heed to the command, evoking the wrath of the King, who promptly ordered them thrown into a blazing furnace.

The attendants stoked the fire to a temperature seven times hotter than it had ever been before. In fact, the furnace was so hot, and the flames so high, that the guards carrying the three rebels were burned to death by the fire as they forced them into the blazing inferno.

The King exclaimed, "Say, there are four men walking around in the furnace without being burned, and the fourth looks like the Son of God." On the King's order, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego emerged from the furnace; their hair was not singed, their clothes were not burned, and the smell of fire was not on them.

Nebuchadnezzar, declaring that the Hebrew God had saved the three men, decreed that whosoever thereafter should blaspheme the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego should be cut into pieces.

4: Nebuchadnezzar had another vision, and Daniel, interpreting it, predicted that Nebuchadnezzar would live with the animals and eat grass like an ox. This prophesy came true. A few years later, when Nebuchadnezzar's understanding was restored, he blessed, thanked, and praised the Most High.

During the reign of King Belshazzar, he gave a party at which the gold and silver vessels taken from the sanctuary in the Jerusalem Temple were used by the guests in drinking their wine. Their revelry was interrupted by the appearance of a human hand writing on the palace wall. The King, terrified, called upon his astrologers and prophets to read the writing. They could not.

Then he called upon Daniel. Daniel's answer to King Belshazzar: "You have inherited a mighty kingdom; instead of giving thanks, you have grown proud and haughty; you have used Jehovah's holy utensils while paying homage to your own gods. The writing, Mene Mene Tekel Upharsin, means that your kingdom has come to an end and will be given to the Medes and Persians."

The King, in gratitude for this news, proclaimed Daniel third

rank in the entire kingdom, clothed him in scarlet, and placed a chain of gold around his neck.

That same night, the Medes captured the kingdom; King Belshazzar was slain.

King Darius, the Mede, conqueror of Babylon, named Daniel as one of his administrators. Daniel demonstrated superior administrative abilities which caused the other administrators to be jealous. They began to plot against him. They persuaded Darius to issue his statute forbidding prayer to any God but himself, with death as a penalty for violation.

After Daniel had violated the ordinance, he was seized and, on order of the King, promptly thrown in a lion's den. The next morning, the King, who had fasted all night and grieved over what he had done, rushed to the entrance of the den and called out to Daniel: "Daniel, was your God able to save you?"

And Daniel answered: "My God has saved me — long live the King."

By command of King Darius, Daniel was brought up from the lion's lair. Those that had accused him, and their wives and children, were thrown into the pit. The lions tore them to shreds.

The King sent a message throughout his Empire that all men should prostrate themselves before Daniel's God.

7: During the reign of Belshazzar, Daniel himself had a vision involving four mammoth beasts which rose from the sea during a storm. The first beast appeared to be a lion with eagle's wings, the second a bear, standing on all four feet, which had three ribs between its teeth, the third, a creature appearing like a leopard with four bird's wings on its back (it had four heads and was vested with kingly power), and the fourth, a beast with rough skin, iron teeth, and bronze claws, with ten horns. The wings of the lion were plucked off as the lion stood up on its hind legs. The bear ate meat. A little horn sprang up from among the horns of the fourth beast, displacing three horns; the little horn had eyes and a mouth that spoke. The beast was killed; the other creatures remained alive for awhile.

Then Daniel saw what appeared to be Son of Man riding upon heavenly clouds, who was presented to Father Time, and thereafter ruled all the world.

Daniel sought the meaning of the vision and was told: "The beasts represent four kingdoms; the fourth kingdom will conquer the earth and subdue and oppress its peoples. It will have ten kings, and after, still another who will prevail over three kings. He will rebel against the Most High, and the saints will be his subjects for a time and times and half a time."

Later, Daniel had another vision where he saw a ram with two horns attacked and killed by a billy goat from the west having one long ugly horn.

As the billy goat stood gloating in victory, its horn snapped and was replaced by four horns. From one of these, a small horn emanated. Daniel heard an Holy One ask, "For how long will our land and the Holy Place be subjected?" And another answer, "2,300 days".

Then Daniel heard someone say "Gabriel, interpret this vision for Daniel". Gabriel told Daniel, "The vision is applicable to the time of the end. The two-horn ram represents the kings of Media and Persia, the billy goat the Greeks, and the horn on the forehead of the billy goat the first king. Four smaller horns (kingdoms) shall rise out of the Greek nation, but not with the greatness or power of the first kingdom. *See Historical Note.

"In the last days of those kingdoms, a powerful and crafty king shall appear, who shall oppress many. At the end, he shall be broken, but not by the hand of man."

"In the first year of the rule of Darius, I, Daniel, after fasting and while robed in sackcloth, was praying one evening when I was approached by the man, Gabriel, who had appeared to me earlier in my visions. He gave me further interpretation of my illusions, thus:

"Seventy weeks shall be tolled for you and your people; then rebellion and sin will be ended, your city restored, and the Most Holy Place anointed. Sixty-nine more weeks shall pass — a prince shall appear, to live in a revitalized and rebuilt Jerusalem for sixty-two more weeks. Then the anointed one shall be removed; an invading prince shall raze the city and the Temple. The desolation shall settle upon her once again."

In the third year of the rule of Cyrus, Daniel saw another vision: "I saw a man on the bank of the Tigris River. His gleaming body was clothed in linen, secured at the waist with a fine gold belt. Seeing my fright, he explained, 'I have come to tell the future for your people (the Jews). After I have fought the prince of Persia, the kingdom of Greece will come against me. Only the angel Michael will help me.

"Three more kings will appear in Persia, and then another, rich and ambitious. He will rally the world against Greece.

"A mighty king shall arise in Greece and none shall stand against him. When he dies, his domain will be divided north,

*Historical Note: Following the fall of Babylon, Asia Minor was ruled by Persia (Medes) until 334 B.C., when Persia and Asia Minor (including Canaan) succumbed to Alexander the Great of Macedonia (Greece). After Alexander's death, his kingdom was divided into four kingdoms, ruled by:

- 1) Ptolemy I of Egypt in the South,
- 2) Seleucus of Babylonia in the East,
- 3) Antigonus of Syria and Asia Minor in the North, and
- 4) Antipater of Macedonia and Greece in the West.

From time to time, Persia would regain some of its strength and threaten one or more of these kingdoms. Also, the kingdoms frequently fought each other.

Finally, these kingdoms yielded to Rome.

south, east, and west. At first the southern king (Egypt) will overcome the kingdom of the north; then the northern kingdom (Syria) will overrun the southern kingdom, and when the north has captured the south (at one point a few of your people will attempt to intervene and be summarily dealt with by either or both of the powers), it will attempt to enlarge its domain by campaigns against the coastal islands. A strong foreign power will prevent this.

“The north and the south will continue to do battle with each other, but the north will prevail, and from time to time, the north will gratify its frustrations by attacking the Holy Covenant, desecrating the sanctuary and sacking the city. This king will speak contemptuously of the God of gods. He will exalt himself, even above every god. Still, some of the lands of the south, Edom, Moab, and the Ammonites, will escape, and Egypt, Libya, and Ethiopia, though subjected, will survive.

“Then Michael shall come forth to fight for you. At that moment your people, each one whose name is written in the Book, will be delivered.’ I asked the man, ‘When? — How long will it be?’ He answered: ‘It shall be for a time, times, and a half. From the time the regular offering is abolished and the abomination of desolation is set up there shall be a time period of 1,290 days. It is then that the promise you hold shall be fulfilled.’”

HOSEA (722 B.C.)

Hosea (northern kingdom) received these instructions from Yahweh during the reign of Jeroboam (Israel), and the reigns of Uzziah, Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah (Judah).

Jehovah ordered him: "Marry a loose woman, a prostitute."

Hosea married Gomer, a woman of whoredom. She promptly conceived and gave birth to a son. Hosea named the boy Jezreel, to signify that the kingdom of Israel would end in the Valley of Jezreel at the hand of God.

When Gomer gave birth to a daughter, Jehovah commanded Hosea to name the child Lo-ruhamah (meaning — *not loved*), signifying God's abandonment of Israel. Hosea named the child "*not loved*".

Later, when Gomer, the wanton wife, gave birth to a son, Jehovah commanded that the child be named Lo-ammi (meaning — *not mine*), signifying that the Israelites of the northern kingdom were no longer God's people. The boy was named Lo-ammi (meaning — *not mine*).

"God says," declared Hosea, "the time will come when Judah and Israel will unite and be one people, His people."

Gomer left Hosea. She sought the attention of other men, giving herself to them for food and drink. She met and married another man. Hosea tried to get her back. He begged his children to plead with his wife to return to him. He reminded her that it was he who had furnished her clothing, food, wine, and the silver and gold which she had given Baal.

Even as Israel has abandoned their provider, Yahweh, and worshipped Baal instead.

The Lord commanded Hosea, "Buy back your wife."

Hosea repurchased her, but placed her in isolation for a period of time before he would sleep with her.

Even as Israel will be, for a period of time, without a king, prince, sacrifice, ephod, or even idols.

Hosea preached to his countrymen: "In the eyes of God you are at fault. It is your lying, killing, stealing, and sinning in which you, the people and priests, have indulged which causes the Lord's anger and His abandonment of you now. Haughty Israel shall be humbled. A strong wind shall carry her away. Judah also shall fall."

Hear Jehovah's plea:

6: "Ephraim and Judah — repent. Accept My love. Avoid the punishment which I shall inflict upon you.

"I had hoped to forgive Israel. How can I justify it? The kings, officials, priests, the people — all — revel in the worship of gods. They have sought help from Assyria — from Egypt — but not

from Me. The peoples of Ephraim will not stop the practice of their many evils.

“I shall bring war against Israel; the land shall be wasted, the cities pillaged — and its riches swept away. Her people shall be deported to Egypt and Assyria as servants and slaves and there be compelled to eat unclean food.

“But I am the Holy One. I have lived among you — I did not come to destroy. From Egypt and Assyria My people shall return to this land. I will settle them in their homes.”

Hosea continued to warn: “Judah has also sinned. God has not overlooked them. They will also be punished. Return to the worship of God. Repent. Rely on Him alone.”

JOEL

Comment

The author, unknown, may have been a priest or a farmer, or both. Maybe it was written around 400 B.C. Prose and poetry.

* * * * *

Joel shouted these messages of God:

"Listen! The Lord is leading an army of locusts toward our land. First will come palmerworms, then the swarmer locusts, and after them the cankerworms, and finally the caterpillars. The land will be devastated. The cities will be covered as if by a blanket. Even the trees will be stripped. There will be no crops. The cities will stink with piles of rotting insects. Weep as you will, but the Lord's mantle of death is on its way.

"There will be no escape.

"Repent, ye, and turn to the Lord. The Lord's compassion for you will move Him to help. He will send you food. You will recover. No longer will you be a reproach among the Gentiles. Pastures, crops and vineyards will grow again. Soft rains will fall, the plants will thrive, and once again food for our people will be plentiful. The people will receive the Spirit of God, and they will prophesy.

"When the sun has turned into darkness and the moon into blood, and the earth is wrung through portents of blood and fire, the Day of Judgment will come. On that day, all nations (except Judah and Jerusalem, who shall be exalted) shall suffer. Tyre, Zidon, Philistia, Edom, and Egypt shall receive their just due. Egypt and Edom shall become desolate deserts as retribution for their indifference to the misfortunes of the people of Judah.

"But Jerusalem and Judah shall be fertile, with streams of milk and fresh wine flowing among its hills, and clear, running brooks meandering through green meadows. A fountain shall spring up from the Temple in Jerusalem and its waters shall run into the gorge of Shittim.

"And in Zion the Lord will dwell."

AMOS

Comment

750 B.C. Amos may have been the author of the description of events which occurred in the 7th or 8th Century B.C. There are passages in the text which indicate a much later date. Particularly suspect is that portion of Amos which presupposes the fall of Judah and the restoration of the house of David, events of later centuries.

* * * * *

1: Amos claimed to be a shepherd, not a prophet, who received visions concerning Israel during the reigns of Uzziah of Judah and Jeroboam of Israel, two years before the earthquake.

The Lord told Amos, via vision:

"The people in Damascus have sinned. I will enter the gates, burn up the king's palace and kill the people of the city. Whatever survivors remain, I shall carry to Kir as slaves.

"Gaza has sinned; I will burn her walls and exterminate the Philistines.

"Tyre sinned when it refused to aid Israel when it was taken; I will burn the walls of Tyre.

"Edom has sinned, for it pursued the Israelites in vengeance; I will burn Teman and the palaces of Bozrah in Edom.

"Ammon has sinned; I will burn their walls and palaces and send their kings, and their families, into exile.

"Moab has sinned; I will destroy their palaces.

"Judah has sinned; with fire shall it be destroyed. It shall devour the palaces of Jerusalem.

"Israel has sinned; they don't remember how I helped them, bringing them from Egypt through the desert, pushing out the Amorites and giving them the land.

"O, Israel, hear thy destiny. I chose you from among all the peoples, for you alone I cared. Now your sin separates us and you must be punished. In times past, I have withheld the rain, laid waste your crops and vineyards with blight, sent locusts to consume your harvest and pestilences and plagues to take the lives of your loved ones. I have even caused invasions and invoked earthquakes. All this! — And you have not listened — you did not come back to Me.

"Now, the funeral of Israel is near. They will fall to rise no more. In the cities, on the farms, in the streets, there will be heard the sounds of sorrow, of weeping, of cries of anguish and pain. The whole nation shall mourn."

7: God showed Amos, in a vision, that He intended to send a plague of grasshoppers. Amos later told the people, "I plead with Him to desist, and He acceded to my plea. He threatened a

punishment by fire, and I plead with Him again, and He again relented. Then the Lord said He would measure His people with a plumbline; He would set the sword against them."

Amaziah, the priest, reported to Jeroboam, the king, that Amos was conspiring against him. He ordered Amos to leave Israel and do his prophesying in Judah. Amos answered: "I'm not leaving, I'm no prophet, but even so, know this: Your wife shall become a harlot in this city; your children shall be killed by the sword; your land shall be taken from you; your people shall be captured and deported; and you, too, will die in a foreign land."

Amos repeated these promises the Lord gave him to deliver: "I will disperse the people of Israel into all the nations. Yet, I pledge that I will not lose sight of even one. Someday, Jerusalem will be rebuilt and My people will return to live therein.

"Once again, My people Israel shall be prosperous. I will plant them on their own soil and they shall never again be dispossessed from the land I have given them. This is the Word of the Lord your God."

OBADIAH

Comment

Who Obadiah was is unknown. The prophesy date is alleged to be somewhere around 600 B.C. For generation after generation, the doom of Edom was a constantly repeated forecast among Hebrew prophets. Obadiah was one of many.

* * * * *

Obadiah had a vision whereby Yahweh showed him the future of Edom. "God has instructed the nations to send their armies against Edom. Edom danced with glee when Israel was overrun by her enemies, her people imprisoned and deported to foreign lands. For this, God has decided to punish Edom — no, God has decided to destroy it. The nomads who live in the Negeb shall occupy Edom.

"Soon God shall have His revenge of all the Gentile nations.

"Jerusalem will become a refuge to which God's exiled people shall return. In that day, they shall occupy Phoenicia, the Philistine plains, Ephraim, Samaria, and Gilead. The new kingdom, so established, shall be ruled by Jehovah."

JONAH

Comment

Nineveh was destroyed in 612 B.C. The author of Jonah is unknown, but the date for the writing is placed by various scholars at different times somewhere between the 2nd and 8th centuries B.C. It is argued that since Nineveh was not destroyed within the Book of Jonah, the time of the writing of the book occurred sometime before that event. This argument would seem sound, assuming the events described in the book are true stories, rather than works of fictional, symbolic, or demonstrative prose.

* * * * *

1: Jonah (a prophet), of Gath-hepher, received instructions from God that he was to go to Nineveh, capital of Assyria, denounce it for its evil ways, and inform it that its destruction by the Lord was immediately forthcoming. Jonah, instead, obtained passage on a ship bound for Tarshish.

The Lord sent a storm across the seas and the resulting high wind and waves threatened the ship upon which Jonah sailed, endangering the lives of all those aboard her. The sailors cast lots to determine fault, and this procedure indicated that Jonah was the cause. Jonah confessed his attempted escape from the Lord and advised the sailors to throw him overboard. They promptly threw him overboard.

Then the wind was calm and the waves were stilled.

Jonah was swallowed by a large fish. In the belly of the fish, Jonah prayed: "I thank Thee, oh Lord, for Your aid. Death pulled me down into the depths of the sea; I was drowning — I could no longer see or hear. As I felt the ocean's coffin close over me, I prayed, and You pulled me from the grave."

The Lord ordered the fish to spit Jonah from it, and Jonah found himself on dry land. There, the Lord repeated His order that Jonah travel to Nineveh with His message. Jonah did not hesitate — and as soon as he reached the limits of the city, he began delivering the message:

"Nineveh shall fall to the enemy within forty days."

The peoples of the City of Nineveh were impressed with Jonah's words. The king proclaimed that all his subjects fast and mourn. The citizens robed themselves in sackcloth, sat in ashes, and wailed. They repented.

When God observed that the peoples of Nineveh had repented, He changed His mind; the disaster which Jonah prophesied to occur within forty days did not happen.

Jonah was embarrassed and humiliated. He prayed for death, then went out to the edge of the city, built himself a hut, and sat and sulked. He argued bitterly with God.

God asked Jonah, "Are you angry?" And Jonah responded, "Yes, I am very angry."

And God asked — "Should I not show compassion upon Nineveh, with its 120,000 people and innumerable cattle?"

MICAH

Comment

740 B.C., probably. The date is based upon the proposition that the contents are a prophesy.

* * * * *

1: Micah, a prophet of Morasheth (near Gath, southwestern Judah), reported these words from the Lord during the reigns of Jotham, Ahaz, and Hezekiah of Judah.

"The Lord has left His home in Heaven and stands on the mountain overlooking us, saying:

"I will make Samaria a heap of ruins;

"Cry for the City of Gath, for it is doomed;

"Aphrah, Saphir, Zaanah, Maroth, Lachish, Moresheth-gath, and Achzib shall be buried, never to recover. The peoples of those cities have sinned, and they are doomed.

"Someday I will gather together such a few of you as may be left, as one gathers sheep in a flock. A shepherd will lead you through the gates as I go before you to show the way.

"As for the leaders of Israel — who have led the people in sin, judged for gain, failed to work, or made a charge for prophesy — they shall suffer the loss of their Holy City, Jerusalem, and it shall become a heap of ruins."

4: Micah continues the prophesy: "But someday the Lord shall rule all the world from Mt. Zion, His home in Jerusalem. The nations shall pay homage to Him there."

5: Jerusalem is besieged. From tiny Bethlehem shall come forth a ruler for Israel. Those that remained in Jerusalem shall be joined by those who were exiled. He shall appear unto them. He will be their shepherd and rule them in peace.

"When the Assyrian comes, we will appoint seven or eight men who shall waste Assyria with the sword and we shall be delivered from them.

"And Israel shall become strong and mighty, superior to the surrounding nations, and she will destroy them. The Lord will destroy the defenses of Gentile cities, lay them bare and smash their idols. He will smite the wicked people of Jerusalem with famine, and bring them suffering and death.

"As for me," said Micah, "I place my trust in the Lord. I will bear His anger until He have compassion upon me."

NAHUM

Comment

If the writings in Nahum were prophesy, that is, they were in fact a prophesy rather than a declaration of that which had already occurred, his book would have been written in about 625 B.C. since it predicts the fall of Nineveh. Nahum may have come from Judah.

* * * * *

This is an account of Nahum's vision (Nahum lived in Elkosh):
The Lord is a jealous God, a God of vengeance but slow to anger. His wrath, once aroused, is overwhelmingly terrifying.

The time of Nineveh (capital of Assyria) has come. The red suited army is inside the river gates. Nineveh's defenses crumble; the soldiers desert and flee before the on-rushing chariots; the streets run with blood; corpses are piled in bloody stacks of flesh and bone everywhere; the city's women are naught but spoil; enemy soldiers enslave the Assyrian officers. Woe to Nineveh — all is lost.

Nineveh suffers now because she conquered other nations and led them astray. The Lord brings His punishment. Says the Lord of Hosts: "Today I expose your naked body to the world. Upon you I will heap loathsome slime and filth for all to see.

"Assyria, all who hear the news that you perish shall rejoice, for all the world has felt the sting of your wickedness."

HABAKKUK

Comment

In the Septuagint, Habakkuk appears as Ambakoum, very similar to an Assyrian word. No evidence has been discovered which would give us any knowledge as to who Habakkuk was. He may have been a priest, prophet, laborer, or layman. Habakkuk's alleged prophecies center around the period 600 B.C., a date ascertained from the subject matter of the material. Recent critics place the time of the writing of the book in the days of Alexander the Great, 300 B.C., or even at a later time. Two chapters of Habakkuk were found in the Dead Sea Scroll. In this script are verses which place the author within the 1st century, B.C.

* * * * *

This is an account of the prophet Habakkuk's vision:

"God, I am in the midst of wicked people. Is there to be no justice for them?"

The Lord answered: "Their punishment is coming. I am sending an army so strong, mighty, and vicious that none will be able to stand before it. The Chaldeans will march through the nations, wreaking a cruel, violent toll of the peoples of the lands that they overcome."

Alarmed, Habakkuk exclaimed: "But wait, Lord, our Most Mighty God. It is true that we are sinful, but there are those of us who strive to be obedient and act righteously. Even those among us who are wicked are less evil than those You send against us, the Chaldeans from Babylonia.

"Will You give us to them? Are we no better than the fish who, by chance, run afoul of the fisherman's net?"

And this is the answer which God gave to the prophet Habakkuk: "Wait. Although they, the Chaldeans, may plunder the nations of the world now, the time will come when they themselves will be vanquished and put to the sword. Those who build their city with blood shall reap grief and despair."

The prophet mused: "God, I have seen Your mighty miracles and know that there is mercy in Your wrath. You are awesome. Your fiery form sweeps across the mountains. You make a place for the rivers, chart the course of the sun, stop the moon in its path, and smite the nations;

"And even though the time may come that there is no harvest, the orchards yield no fruit, and the cattle and sheep do not multiply, even then, I will glorify my God —

"For He is my strength."

ZEPHANIAH

Comment

Zephaniah predicted the events 620 B.C., the time of Josiah; therefore, Zephaniah must have been preaching around 630 B.C. He lived in Jerusalem, prophesying judgment of Judah.

The authenticity of many sections of the book have been questioned, it appearing that many of the verses were written after the exile.

* * * * *

1: God's word to Zephaniah, in the reign of King Josiah, Judah.

The Lord says: "I will sweep the earth clean.

"I will eradicate the idols, punish the priests and the officers of the palace, exterminate the business men of Jerusalem, spill blood on the streets, desolate the cities of Judah and make refugees of their townspeople (some of the Judah survivors will flee to the Philistine coastland), make a wasteland of Moab and Ammon (for their insults of My chosen people), destroy Assyria, slice up Ethiopia with the sword — and — then, after I have done these things,"

Sayeth the Lord,

"I will bring a remnant of My people into Jerusalem. The proud and haughty will not be among them. There they shall find refuge in Me. Their name shall be restored; they shall have a place of esteem among the nations. I will live with them there."

HAGGAI

Comment

A post-exilic prophet, a contemporary of Zechariah, 535 B.C., according to the text material, whose prophecies are dated August and November 520 B.C. in relation to the Persian time table.

* * * * *

1: Haggai, the prophet, told Zerubbabel, governor of Judah, and Joshua, the High Priest of Judah, that he received this message from Jehovah:

"Jehovah says that you shall rebuild His Temple; He tells me that you have delayed too long in undertaking this important work. For that reason, He is going to send a drought upon the land."

Zerubbabel, with the help of his priests, began the rebuilding of the Holy edifice.

After the work had been undertaken, Haggai told Zerubbabel and Joshua that he had received this message from the Most High:

"The House of God which you are building will be even bigger and more beautiful than the last Temple. God promises that He will induce the neighboring nations to assist; they will send gifts of gold and silver and furnish other forms of assistance in order that the Temple can be properly rebuilt."

Later, Haggai gave the governor another message from the Lord of Hosts:

"You have started the work on the Temple. From this day forward, you will be blessed. Good fortune shall come to you because of what you are doing. Your crops will be bountiful.

"Then, sayeth the Lord, 'I will shake the heavens and overthrow the kingdoms and governments of Gentile nations. On that day I will wear you, Zerubbabel, as a signet ring. You are My chosen one.'"

ZECHARIAH

Comment

Zechariah may have been a priest and prophet, probably returning to Jerusalem from exile in Babylon in 537 B.C. The book itself appears to have been written in various styles and, therefore, at different times and by different peoples. The difference in style, language and form are admitted, but those who defend the book as being the works of a single author argue that such difference in language, form and nature do not preclude Zechariah from being the author of the whole, pointing out that there are common expressions in all sections of the book. There is a lack of agreement among critics.

* * * * *

1: King Darius, the Mede, had ruled two years when the prophet, Zechariah, had this vision:

"At the river, I saw a man sitting on a red horse, flanked by black, white and dappled horses. Two of the angels, responding to my inquiry, advised me that they were there to prowl the earth, and that everywhere there was tranquility and peace. One of the angels prayed to God that God, at last, show compassion upon the peoples of Judah and Jerusalem by the restoration of their cities.

"The Lord of Hosts answered: 'I have returned to Jerusalem. My Home shall be rebuilt there. The cities of Judah shall once again be prosperous.'"

Then the Most High showed Zechariah four horns and four carpenters. He told him that the horns represented the four conquering nations that had dispersed Judah, and that the carpenters would cast out the powerful Gentile kings. He promised to crush any country that fights against His people. He predicted that foreign armies would join them then and that He would be their God, too.

"I saw a vision in which there was a gold lampstand with seven lamps, seven pipes and two olive trees, one tree standing on each side of the lampstand. The angel, interpreting my dream, showed me Joshua, the High Priest, standing before the angel of the Lord. Satan, at the angel's right hand, was arguing. Joshua's clothes were dirty; the angel gave him clean clothes, including, at my request, a new turban.

"Then the angel told Joshua: 'If you obey Me, you shall be the chief of my household and carry the keys to Heaven. I inform all of you gathered here, including Joshua, that one day I will erase the guilt of the peoples of the land. On that day, I will bring My servant, the Branch. I set a stone, a stone with seven eyes, before Joshua.'

"The angel avowed that no force could prevent Zerubbabel from

completion of the Temple.”

“In a vision, I, Zechariah, saw a flying scroll and I asked the angel what it meant. He told me that the scroll represented a curse to liars and thieves. Those who had committed such sins, he told me, would die in their own homes as their houses collapsed upon them when the flying scroll passed over them.

“I saw what appeared to be a barrel and a woman sitting inside it. Two more women, with wings on their backs, carried the barrel across the sky. The angel told me that the woman in the cask was ‘Wickedness’, who was tied therein and being delivered to the land of Shinar (Babylon).

“I saw four chariots pulled by red, black, white, and dappled horses, respectively, traveling between two copper mountains. The angel told me that the chariots represented the four spirits of Heaven pacing the earth.”

The Lord of Hosts spoke to me: “Collect silver and gold from the exiles, and with it make a crown and place it upon the head of Joshua, son of Josedech. Charge Joshua that the Branch will spring up and rebuild God’s Temple. The Branch will rule as King and Priest.”

7: God told Zechariah: “I have returned to Jerusalem — I will live there — it shall be called the City of Truth — Zion, My mountain shall be called The Holy Mountain. I will reclaim My people from the nations east and west and return them to live in Jerusalem. There we shall live — they will be My people and I will be their God.

“I know,” the Lord of Hosts acknowledged, “in the past, Israel and Judah have been a weak and helpless people cursed by all the world. Do not be afraid; I shall rescue you. Other nations shall revere you and exalt your name.”

9: Zechariah declared: “The end is here for Tyre, Zidon, Ashkelon, Gaza, and Ashdod; they shall go down before their attackers. Rejoice, Jerusalem — your King is coming to you in victory, humble and mounted on an ass’ foal. He shall abolish war in Ephraim (Israel) and Judah. He shall rule in peace from the River to the ends of the earth. The Lord’s people shall be victorious against Greece and their other enemies and He shall be at their side.

“The Lord of Hosts will bring rain and good fortune to Judah and Israel when He resettles His people in Jerusalem. From Egypt and Assyria, the people will come. The Nile shall become dry and the power of Egypt will fade away; Assyria will fall to her enemies.”

God told Zechariah to obtain a job as shepherd of sheep, and to

break his staffs (called Beauty and Bands), demonstrating that God's contract with Judah and Israel, having been broken, was ended. For a time, the people would have a wicked shepherd as a leader.

"This," said Zechariah, "is the word of the Most High, the same God who laid the foundation of the earth and created man, concerning Israel: 'Judah will be alone against the Gentile world. On that day all the nations of the earth shall be poised to attack her. I will make Jerusalem invincible; I shall cause the horses of the other nations to become blind and their riders insane. The clans of Judah outside Jerusalem shall assault and overrun the enemy armies. On that day, I will destroy all those nations. They shall see Me, whom they have pierced, and they will mourn.'

"On that day a fountain shall be opened for David's descendants and the residents of Jerusalem to remove all sin. There will be no more idols. There shall be no more prophets; he who pretends to prophesy shall be killed by his own parents.

"The Mount of Olives shall be divided. A river shall begin in Jerusalem, flowing to the east and to the west. The Lord will smite the nations who made war on Jerusalem with a plague, by which the tongues, flesh and eyes of their people shall waste away as they stand. The survivors of these nations shall thereafter come to Jerusalem each year to worship the Lord during the Tabernacle Feast. Those who do not come shall suffer drought in their land. This includes Egypt.

"In that day, the utensils in Jerusalem shall be sacred. The bowls in the Temple will be provided to the people; the Holy House will be free of the Canaanite."

MALACHI

Comment

It appears from the text that Malachi lived after the time of the rebuilding of the Temple, 516 B.C., but there is no other reference to his time. It is suspected that he lived and predicted in the 450 B.C. neighborhood.

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From the Lord of Hosts to Israel through Malachi:

"My name is great among the nations. Everywhere sacrifices and incense are offered in My name. I am revered everywhere. But you, My very own people, dishonor Me. You promised choice animals for your sacrifices and then bring me sick ones. Curses upon those who cheat in performing their sacrificial vows.

"You, My priests, had better start listening to Me. If you don't, I will add more curses to those I have made. I will take vengeance upon your children. I will smear the manure of the sacrificial animals across your faces. I will cast you out. My contract with you, My priests, was that you would walk in harmony with Me and speak the truth to the people. You have ignored My instructions."

Malachi told the people that they had wearied the Lord by their worship of idols, by their intermarriage with Gentile women who worshipped foreign gods, by adultery, cruelty, failure to tithe, and by the offering of blemished animals as sacrifices. "To avoid the curse of God," he said, "repent, and tithe to the Treasury.

"You have seen the wicked excused and have asked yourself, 'So why serve God?' God's answer to you is: 'The proud and wicked shall be punished, but those who are righteous shall be victorious.' The deeds of each of us are recorded in a Book of Remembrance which the Lord shall consult on judgment day."

The Lord says: "Behold, the day comes that the world shall burn. Follow the Law of Moses always. I will send Elijah before the final day of judgment. He will reconcile the differences between fathers and sons, abating My anger, and quieting any temptation I may have to destroy the earth."

THE APOCRYPHA

(100 - 400 B.C.)

Comment

The following books, Esdras through Maccabees, were deleted from the Bible by the Protestant leadership in 1629.

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THE FIRST BOOK OF ESDRAS

(The First Book of Esdras is substantially the same as the version of Ezra hereinbefore set out. The following additional account is included in the Apocryphal version.)

1 Esdras, 3: During a holiday, three men of King Darius' bodyguard submitted to the King their respective opinions as to the strongest force on earth, with the expectation that the King would richly reward the winner.

The first young man said wine was strongest because it equalized the minds of rich or poor, king or peasant, creating grief, debt, joy, and havoc for all.

The second officer spoke to the assembled body of nobles and officials. "The King is strongest," he declared, "for man obeys him. He makes war, governs, and lives as he, alone, dictates, and his subjects survive in the manner he decides."

The third man, Zerubbabel, speaking in clear, low tones, said: "Sirs, it is true that the King holds the destiny of his subjects, but who rules him? Wine is strong and has its effect upon many men, but who rules them? Who reared them to manhood, determines their dress and dictates their habits? Who is so beautiful and desirable that a man will leave his silver and gold to be by her side? Who, with a smile, a wink, or a way, can reduce a mighty King to a blushing bumbler, or soothe his ire, or stir his might? Can we deny the strength of woman?" His listeners nodded assent.

Zerubbabel had not finished. "And yet," he continued, "there is wickedness in wine, kings, and women. Truth, however, is perfect. It is without prejudice and bias. It applies to all people and things alike. It does not vary with place nor change with time. Praise the God of Truth."

The King and his cohorts agreed that Zerubbabel had won the debate and they asked him to name his prize. Zerubbabel reminded Darius that he, the King, had sworn to rebuild Jerusalem and return the Temple vessels. He asked that the promise be kept.

Darius released Zerubbabel, with escort and letters, to return to his homeland, promising financial help for the restoration of the Temple. He ordered Lebanon and Phoenicia to furnish materials.

and Edom to relinquish to the Jews the land and cities that it occupied.

Forty-two thousand, three hundred sixty Jews, seven thousand, three hundred forty-seven slaves, and a mixed choir of two hundred forty-five songsters returned to Jerusalem. The King's escort of one thousand horsemen delivered them safely.

THE SECOND BOOK OF ESDRAS

During the reign of Ar-ta-xerxes of Persia, Ezra, Levi priest, descendant of Aaron, received word from the Lord that he was to remind the exiles there of their delivery from Egypt and the care given them by the Lord during their emigration (quail and manna for food, water from the desert to drink). Through Ezra, God warned them that if they continued to ignore Him, He would desert them and go to other nations.

The Lord proposed: "I will give to the people of Judah the Kingdom of Jerusalem which I once offered to Israel. I will send Isaiah and Jeremiah to help them. I am the Living God — I brought about good and I have eliminated evil. I will raise up the dead from their graves."

Ezra preached to the Gentiles: "I went to the Israelites with the Lord's Word and they rejected it. Therefore, I say: Gentiles, listen! The end of the world is near. Your Shepherd comes — He will give you a perpetual peace. Receive the Savior."

In a vision, I saw Him, a tall young man, the Son of God (an angel told me) handing out gold crowns to the immortal on Mt. Zion.

Once (about thirty years after Jerusalem had fallen), Ezra spoke to the Most High: "Lord, it was You who created the earth and Adam, and populated the earth through the descendants of Noah. It was You who selected the offspring of Abraham as Your people, rescued them from Egypt, and led them safely into the Promised Land. But then You allowed the Babylonians to overrun the Holy City and enslave and deport Your people. At that time, I assumed that it was because Your people had become sinful, but since our arrival here, we have learned that the Babylonians were far more wicked than we.

"Why, then, have You destroyed Your own people and preserved Your enemies? Has Babylon paid You homage? Has any other nation even known You?"

The Most High sent an angel, Uriel, who said to Ezra, "You are a mere mortal and do not understand the ways of the Most High — but if you can do any one of the following, I will provide the answers you seek. Weigh me a pound of fire, measure me the force of the wind, or call back a day that has passed."

Ezra admitted that he couldn't do any of those things.

The angel shrugged: "If you can't even understand the things with which you are familiar, how can you hope to comprehend the ways of the Most High?"

"Why, then, did God give me the ability to reason?" argued Ezra. "Why have the Israelites, God's own choice, become a people scorned and mocked by the Gentiles? Why has our contract with God been treated by Him as though it had never existed?"

The angel answered, "Be patient. Good will eventually triumph over evil. Someday your goodness will be rewarded. The storehouse for souls below is not yet filled."

Ezra persisted, "When will these things come to pass? A few years? Many?"

The angel replied: "Much less time than has already passed. Here are some of the signs: Persia will become a barren desert. There will be wickedness throughout the world. At the end of the blast of the Third Trumpet, the world will be confused. The sun will shine in the nighttime and the moon during the day. The juices of wood will become blood. Stones will speak. Stars will change their courses. Birds will fly away. The Dead Sea will cast up fish. Earthquake and storm shall exist everywhere. Women will give birth to monsters. The world will be filled with frustrations and hopelessness."

Ezra fasted, prayed and cried for seven days, and once again he asked the Most High:

"Why have You subjected Your chosen people to humiliation, defeat, derision, and scorn of the heathen countries? Do You so hate Your own people?"

The Most High again sent Uriel, who explained to Ezra: "Mere man cannot understand the ways of the Most High."

Ezra reminded the angel, "We will all be dead by the time God decides to reward us."

"The Lord will restore to life every creature that He has made," the angel rejoined.

"Near the day of judgment," said the angel, "The Book shall be opened. Infants shall speak. Premature babies of three months shall be born, walk and run. Springs, rivers, and brooks shall stop running for three hours. Be patient."

Ezra wept and fasted for seven more days. Again he spoke to the Most High.

"Lord, on the first day You created light from the Spirit and the darkness; on the second day, You caused the Spirit of Heaven to divide the earth from the sky; the third day, You collected the waters in a seventh part of the earth and retained the other six parts as dry land. On the fourth day, You made the sun, moon, and stars; on the fifth day, You created life in the sea and on land, fishes and animals. On that day, You set apart two creatures, Enoch (Behemoth), to go upon the land — and Leviathan, the monster of the sea. The sixth day, You produced cattle, animals, reptiles, and Adam, from which comes all mankind.

"Of all the peoples of the nations of the earth, we, alone, have been chosen as Yours, and the rest are as chaff in the wind, or so You have said. If You have made this world for us, Oh Lord, —

why may we not have possession of it at this time?"

Again Uriel, the angel, came to Ezra, saying:

"You suffer under the judgment of Adam. All men must endure earthly torments in order to obtain the blessings which have been set aside for them. The wicked who do not obey God shall not receive their Heavenly due.

"The signs I have given you will happen — My Son, Jesus, shall arrive with His companions. They will bring about four hundred years of rejoicing to all who may be living at that time. Then My Son, Jesus, and all mankind shall die. After seven days, the new period will begin. The earth shall surrender those who rest there and the secret places shall give up their souls. The Most High shall rule upon the judgment seat."

"But look here," Ezra pointed out, "most of us have committed mortal sins. Is there nothing more to our destiny than to live in misery now and expect further punishment after our death? It would have been better if we had never been born."

8: The angel replied, "It is the man's own choice. The next world is only for the few."

And Ezra prayed, before he was taken to Heaven, that God should be patient with man, withhold His anger and show, instead, His compassion for him.

Once, as he meditated in the meadow, Ezra saw a woman in mourning. When he attempted to comfort her, she suddenly became a city. Uriel, the angel, chanced by and explained to Ezra what his vision meant:

"You saw Jerusalem. For thirty years, no sacrifices were offered there. Then Solomon built the city. Now go into the city, Ezra, and tomorrow I will show you what will happen to the earth near the Day of Judgment."

11: Next night, sleeping in that city, Ezra had a dream involving an eagle with twelve wings and three heads. One of the wings became the earth's ruler, then the next, and so on, until there was left only six little wings. Then a lion came out of the woods (a fourth beast).

The Most High interpreted Ezra's vision: "The eagle represents one of the kingdoms in Daniel's vision. Someday the earth will be ruled by twelve kings, one after another. The second will have the longest reign. The last years of the earth will be ruled by three kings. One king will die in his bed, two will be slain by the sword. The lion you saw was really the Messiah. He will bring those rulers, alive, to judgment and punish them.

"This is one of the secrets of the Most High and no one but you has been approved to receive it. So write it down, hide it, and teach it only to the most wise."

13: Seven days later, Ezra had another dream: He saw a man fly up from the sea and sit on a mountain. He breathed fire upon

attacking hordes of warriors, and they were consumed. When he came down the mountain, many people, some of whom were newly freed slaves, joined him.

Ezra called out to the Most High for enlightenment. The Most High explained: "The man you saw was the Deliverer, My Son, and when He has made known His presence near the Day of Judgment, all the nations of the world will come to wage war against Him. He will sit on Mount Zion and there He will defeat His attackers.

"Then He will collect the ten tribes of Israel which had been carried into exile by the Assyrians, and the Judean survivors. As He destroys all the nations of the world, He will protect His people.

"And that, Ezra, is the meaning of your vision."

14: God commanded Ezra to put God's messages to him, and his visions, to writing, saying, "The world is divided into twelve parts and nine and one-half parts are gone. So don't delay." Ezra led Sarea, Dabria, Selemia, Ecanus, and Asiel to the meadow, where he dictated to them what he had seen, heard, and been commanded, and they wrote it down. The Most High gave understanding between the men so that they were able to speak and write as they had never done before.

15: The Lord says that He is sending terrible evils upon the world, such as sword, famine, death, and plague. Dragons by the thousands will arise in Arabia to pursue the sinners. Assyria will be plundered by the Carmanians and the Arabs. Babylon will be burned. Asia will suffer poverty, famine, sword, and pestilence; it will be a land of widows. Egypt and Syria will be overflowing with wearers of sackcloth and ashes, and the sound of weeping shall be everywhere. Calamity will reign upon the earth. Fires are being prepared for the destruction of all the world.

But those who have been chosen by God, His people, shall be saved. So sayeth the Lord.

TOBIT

The troubles of Tobit, of the Nephthali tribe, captured and deported by the Assyrians.

Tobit was truthful and just, charitable to his neighbors; of his clan, he, alone, attended the Jerusalem festivals and made his tithes; he gave to the poor and the orphans; after the deportation to Nineveh, he refused to eat Gentile food even though his kinsmen did so; he faithfully and efficiently served Shalmaneser as purchasing agent; he married within his race and by his wife had a son, Tobias.

He buried his dead kinsmen, thereby arousing the wrath of the Assyrian kings.

One night, Tobit slept next the courtyard wall. Sparrows, sitting on the wall above him, discharged their waste, which fell into his eyes, blinding him. White scabs formed on his eyes. He sought the help of doctors, but there was no relief, only aggravation of the condition. He came to realize that he was blind. Tobit, in Nineveh, prayed to God for help.

At about the same time, there was, in Ecbatane, Media, a beautiful young maiden, Sara, who had just lost her seventh newly-wed husband to the demon, Asmodeus, before her marriage could be consummated. Seven times the demon had killed her betrothed on her wedding night. She was still a virgin. She prayed for help.

God sent His angel, Raphael, to help both of them.

Raphael found Tobias walking along the road toward Media, on the way to collect a debt for his father, Tobit, and walked along with him. Their journey required them to stop over at Sara's home in Ecbatane, in Media. (The angel represented to Tobias and to Tobit that he was the son of Ananias, one of their kinsmen.)

The first night Tobias and his companion camped by the Tigris River. There, Tobias captured a large fish which was attempting to bite him. The angel told Tobias to cut the fish open, remove its gall, heart, and liver, and keep them. Tobias asked Raphael the uses to which such organs could be put. "The heart and liver are defenses to anyone attacked by a demon or evil spirit," explained the angel, "and the gall will remove the whiteness over a man's eyes and cure him."

They cooked and ate the fish, but Tobias kept the gall, heart, and liver.

The next night, Tobias and Raphael stayed at the home of Raguel, Sara's father, in Ecbatane. Raguel proposed to Tobias that Tobias should marry his (Tobias') kinsman, Sara. Tobias was reluctant. He had heard that seven men had already exchanged vows with Sara, but each of them died before they could consummate their marriage with her. The story was that as soon as a groom entered her bedchamber, he was killed by the

demon.

Sara was very beautiful. Tobias loved her and finally agreed to marry her. That night, Raguel gave his daughter, Sara, to Tobias.

Hand in hand the newlyweds retired to the bedchamber. Sara was near tears for she feared that her new husband, Tobias, like her husbands past, would become a victim of the demon before their cohabitation. But Tobias had been told by Raphael how to combat the demon. When he entered the bedchamber, he took the fish's liver and heart from his pocket and smoked them over a low flame. The smell caused the demon to flee. Raphael, the angel, overtook the demon in upper Egypt, fought him, and bound and left him there.

After prayer, Tobias and Sara consummated their marriage.

The next morning, Raguel was amazed to see his son-in-law still alive. The family celebrated for several days. Finally Tobias, with his new wife, Sara, and his friend, Raphael, began their homeward journey (while Tobias had enjoyed his honeymoon, Raphael had collected the debt owing Tobit).

Arriving at his father's home in Nineveh, Tobias placed the fish gall in his hand and, approaching his father, smeared it across the white scabs covering his father's eyes. The white covering melted away. Tobit began to cry. "I can see you, Tobias," he shouted happily, "I can see you. Praise God!"

Tobias introduced his bride to his father, neighbors and friends. Another period of feasting ensued. They thanked Raphael, the angel, and offered to pay him for his work. Raphael acknowledged that he was one of the seven angels who wait upon the Lord. Then he rose up and disappeared.

Tobit died at the age of 158. On his death bed, he advised his son to move his family to Media (for he believed the words of Jonas that Nineveh would be destroyed). He predicted, also, that the Jews would be returned to Jerusalem to rebuild the Temple of God. He said that all the nations would someday burn their idols and join in the worship of Jehovah.

After Tobit died, Tobias and his wife returned to Ecbatane in the land of Media, living there with Raguel, Sara's father. He lived to see the destruction of Nineveh by the King of Media.

JUDITH

During Nebuchadnezzar's rule of Assyria, Arphaxad governed Medes, and the two kings declared war on each other. Nebuchadnezzar sent to Cilicia, Damascus, Lebanon, Carmel, Gilead, Galilee, Samaria, Jerusalem, Betane, Chellus, Kades, and even into Egypt and Ethiopia for help.

But no one came to him. They saw that he stood alone against the might of Media, and they jeered his messengers and refused him aid of any kind.

In despair and anger, Nebuchadnezzar hurled his army against the forces of King Arphaxad in the Great Plain, and the desperate fury of his attack overcame the Medes and sent them into flight. He pursued them into Ecbatane, headquarters of Arphaxad, and plundered the town. He overtook Arphaxad in the mountains and dispatched him with arrows.

2: After his victory, Nebuchadnezzar turned his attention to those he had called upon to be his allies and who had rejected him. He sent a massive army into their lands, with instructions to his general, Holophernes, that they should slaughter all those who resisted and deliver to him those who surrendered for his proper application of their punishment.

The army of Holophernes swept across the countryside, burning and plundering as it advanced, laying waste the lands of Phud, Lud, Rassas, the Ishmaelites, Cilicia, Madian, Damascus, Tyre, and Sidon. The peoples of the threatened nations were terrified. They sent messengers to the general promising surrender and appeasement. Holophernes accepted their gifts, devastated their lands and continued his march, coming at last to Geba, opposite Judaea, where he encamped, waiting for the regrouping of his forces.

The people of Jerusalem trembled, but laid up food and weapons in preparation for the onslaught to which they had only meager defenses. The High Priest, Joacim, erected fortifications on the hills overlooking the pass entering the nation.

Those in Jerusalem clad themselves, their wives, children, and slaves in sackcloth. They, and every alien, slave or resident, so clothed and with ashes on their heads, fell face down in front of the Temple. They prayed to God for help. The Lord heard them.

When Holophernes learned that the Israelites were preparing for combat with him, he called a council of his officers. Achior, the Ammonite, told the officers: "The Israelites are Jehovah's people, different from peoples of other nations we have trampled, and should be left alone." This suggestion was ruled treasonable by the council, and they forced Achior into the Israelite camp, intending, they said, to deal with him as they would any other Israelite when they leveled the city.

"There is no God but Nebuchadnezzar," Holophernes avowed.

"Nebuchadnezzar has ruled that the land shall be razed, and so it shall."

In accord with his decree, Holophernes commanded his army to advance. They lay siege to Bethulia, and captured its water supply. For thirty-four days the inhabitants of Bethulia were without water. They held meetings in which they demanded that their leaders surrender the city. And they wept.

Judith, a widow, a citizen of the city, protested the suggestion of surrender. She asked the leaders to hold out for at least five days. Then she covered herself in sackcloth, poured ashes over her head, and prostrated herself in prayer.

When she had finished, she rose, bathed, dressed in seductive clothing, ornaments, anklets, bracelets and rings, and braided her hair. She prepared figs, parched corn, bread, food and wine, and, followed by her maid carrying the delicacies, ventured into the valley to meet the Assyrians. At her request, the sentries took her directly to Holophernes.

"I will give you information concerning the city defenses," she promised the general.

Holophernes, awed by her beauty and wisdom, assigned her to a tent and allowed her to remain in camp. On the fourth night, Holophernes called for her. Judith, dressed alluringly and smelling of exotic perfumes, went to him. At the sight of her, his hands trembled and his heart pounded within him. He was impatient to hold her and to feel her softness against his body. As they dined, he became more and more enamored with her beauty and wit; he enjoyed the wine and paid no attention to the amount which he consumed.

When the meal had ended, Holophernes was drunk, lying prostrate and spent upon his bed. Judith, praying for strength, lifted Holophernes' great sword and brought it down twice across the general's neck, severing his head from his body. She and her maid put the head in a bag and strolled out of camp.

Once back in the city, Judith issued hurried instructions. She organized the defenders so that it would appear to the Assyrians that city troops were going to attack their encampment. At her command, the head of Holophernes was hung over the city wall so that it faced the enemy charge.

As the sun rose, the Assyrians could see that the Israelites were preparing to attack them. They stumbled around in confusion, waiting orders from their general, Holophernes. When no orders came, there was more confusion, and then alarmed shouts. "Look," someone cried, pointing at the city wall, "there hangs the head of our general on the city wall." They panicked and fled, pursued now by the Israelites.

As the foreigners retreated, the Israelite outpost forces

stationed in the hills joined in the chase. Together, they inflicted heavy losses upon the Assyrians. There was plunder and spoil for all.

Joacim and the officials from Jerusalem praised and exalted Judith in several ceremonies. Judith lived until she was 105 years old, a widow, renowned and esteemed throughout her life, and, during that time, no nations made war on Israel.

ESTHER

Comment

The Book of Esther in the Apocrypha, although considerably more descriptive, is substantially the same story as the story of Esther heretofore accounted in the Old Testament. For that reason, the Apocrypha version is not repeated here.

THE WISDOM OF SOLOMON

Love justice, ye who reign. Think and speak of right. Live not only for today, but also for tomorrow.

God created man for immortality. Death is a device of the devil, intended for his disciples alone. At the time of God's coming, the just shall come forth, to be judges of the nations of the world, with the Lord as King. The godless shall receive the punishment due them.

Blessed is the barren woman if she is innocent and has never slept with a man in sin. In Heaven she shall be fruitful. Blessed is the eunuch. God reserves a place for him. It is better to be childless than live in adultery, for the adulterer shall be punished. The righteous live forever; the godless fade away.

Therefore, ye kings, listen: It is God who gave you your position and because of the responsibility you have been given, God will expect more of you. Be wise. Wisdom, akin to immortality, is found by those who seek her. I pray constantly to God for wisdom, and through His guidance my wisdom is tempered with modesty.

It was wisdom who befriended Adam, saved Lot, guided Noah, rescued God's people from Egypt, led them across the desert, and into possession of God's Holy Land. It was wisdom, God's wisdom, which decreed that the occupants of the land would be exterminated gradually to rid the land of idolatrous practices. Who would question His judgment?

It is God's wisdom that His people be judged and punished. Even though we are chastened by Thee, oh Lord, You inflict a thousand times more woe upon our enemies.

How foolish are those who worship the idols. If a man believe the fire, wind, air, stars, or water are gods on account of his appreciation for their wonder and beauty, he should realize how much better is the Maker of those things, for it was by Him that these things were created. It may be that those who worship such things are, in fact, seeking God and have lost their way in attempting to find Him.

They are not pardoned, for if they are learned enough to inquire about the world, they should also have sufficient knowledge to learn about God.

Both the idol and its maker are hateful to God. The devising of idols was the beginning of spiritual fornication. Man's vanity brought them into the world. Idol worshippers are fools. Their end is near.

God has consistently aided His people, and defeated their enemies. He has exalted His people and they have become a glorious nation.

ECCLESIASTICUS

(The Wisdom of Jesus, Son of Sirach.)

I came to Egypt in the 38th year of the reign of King Euergetes, and devoted my time and energy to the translation of words written by my grandfather, Jesus, son of Sirach. My grandfather was well skilled and knowledgeable concerning the matters of which he wrote.

Wisdom is king, created by God. Fear the Lord. Be persevering, patient, courageous, obedient, respectful to parents, humble, studious, honest, unashamed, reverent, truthful, and trustworthy. Do not contend against the rich, disregard the words of learned men, or go to court against a judge. Do not be jealous of your wife, keep company with a female entertainer, nor ogle a woman's figure. Remain true to friends. Fear the Lord.

Do not be lazy, nor overwise, and don't be misled by one's fine clothing. Be reluctant to criticize, and only then after you have given full consideration to the evidence. Do not attempt too many different jobs at the same time. Live up to your word. Never trust your enemy. Do not undertake to do more than you can accomplish.

Wealth is good. When a rich man talks, people listen; a poor man's speech is criticized. But ungodliness is not limited to the poor.

Give God His due. Exalt Him. Do not blame Him. Be content with your lot; be disciplined; pray. Repent.

Seek advice from others. Let neither passion nor lust be your ruler. Do not complain, but it is better to reprove than to be angry secretly. Admit your misgivings openly. There is a time to talk and a time to be silent. Work faithfully. Idle hands are the hands of a fool. Praise wisdom.

For these are the covenants of the Most High — the Book of Covenants which Moses contracted for the heritage of the descendants of Jacob.

25: My soul is soothed to see unity among brothers, love of neighbors, and a compatible union between man and wife. Happy the wise man who enjoys his children, is married to an obedient and reasonable woman, controls his tongue, has respectful servants, and who fears the Lord.

Do not live with an hateful wife; a good wife means a long life. A wife's grace is her husband's joy; a silent wife, a gift from God; a chaste wife is of unlimited value.

Befriend your neighbor. Chastise your children; set your time aside to teach your sons; take care of your health; do not grieve; sleep peacefully; avoid excessive drinking. Wine is life to a man if taken moderately, but to excess, bitterness. Heed warnings and rely on the law; be alert.

Do not put your property in someone else's name; rely upon yourself; work your slaves, for idleness is their enemy; treat all men with honor and consideration; be undemanding of men, whether free-man or servant.

Make sincere sacrifices to the Most High. Do not think you will deceive Him with corruptible gifts.

A wife is wealth. Be selective in choosing those whose advice you seek; rely on righteous men who follow God's laws.

Every man shall experience good, evil, life, and death; lament the dead as decorum dictates, then continue your life as God has allowed you; study the law, but apportion to yourself time of leisure; do not beg; do not fear death; work hard; live in peace.

The Lord made the heavens, sky, sun, moon, stars, rainbow, snow storm, oceans, frost, hail, all of nature's beauty. How marvelous is His power! Honor the Lord. Honor our ancestors — Enoch, who was carried to Heaven — and Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Aaron, Phinehas, Joshua, Caleb, Samuel, Nathan (the prophet), David, Solomon, Elijah, Elisha, Hezekiah, Josiah, Ezekiel, and Simon.

From my youth I have sought wisdom. Though the end is near, I seek it still. And I give praise to God.

BARUCH

This is Baruch's book, written in Babylon five years after the Babylonians (Chaldeans) had taken Jerusalem.

After he had written the book, Baruch read it aloud at a meeting of the Judeans in their Sud River community in Babylon.

When the reading was ended, the assembled sympathizers donated silver and money. Their scribe wrote this letter to their kin in Jerusalem:

"We are sending you these gifts in order that you might purchase and offer sacrifices upon the altar in the Temple in our behalf. Pray for King Nebuchadnezzar and his son that they might live forever, and that we might faithfully serve them and gain their favor.

"Our God was right; we were wrong. We were disobedient and He was in the right to punish us."

The congregation prayed:

"Our God, who delivered our ancestors from Egypt, be merciful, grant us favor with those who hold us captive so that the whole world will know that Thou art God and that we, of Israel, are Your people.

"In Jerusalem, You commanded us to bow down and serve the King of Babylon. If only we had obeyed — we could have remained in Judah, enjoying the land that You gave our ancestors.

"But we didn't —

"And you punished us, slaying our fathers and brothers with sword, plague, and starvation, banishing the remainder of us from our homes. Merciful God, do not continue to punish us for the sins of our fathers; help us here in exile."

Oh, Israel, let us seek wisdom, strength, and understanding. We have been given to the Gentiles, but not for extermination. We will not lose hope. Our enemies will soon be vanquished. We shall return to Jerusalem, and God shall lead us.

A LETTER OF JEREMIAH

This is a letter sent by Jeremiah to the Babylonian captives:

Ye who were taken and led away into Babylon in exile were sinful before God. That is the reason you were enslaved. And you will remain in captivity for seventy years.

Do not worship the Gentile idols. Obviously, the idols are worthless. They may be made of silver, gold, wood, or iron, but they cannot move to save themselves from any living creature that walks, crawls, or moves. Their priests steal from them. Their offerings are sold, given to prostitutes, or even sometimes defiled by the ceremonious participation of a woman in her menstruating period or by one who just gave birth to a child. Obviously, such idols are not gods; do not fear them.

A man without idols is better off.

THE SONG OF THE THREE

(Daniel, between 3:23 and 3:24.)

As Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-nego walked around in the furnace fire, unscathed by leaping flames, Abed-nego (Azariah) prayed:

“Praise God. Our people have sinned. You have delivered us to a wicked king of a lawless nation and made us a loathsome object of shame before the world. We are left a small nation, without leaders, territory, or even a place to worship. But we are loyal to You. Humble our enemies.”

While the flames in the furnace soared, the three sang out:

“Blessed be the God of our fathers. All His works shall bless Him and sing His praise. The stars, sun and moon, rain and dew, winds, and fire and heat, shall exalt and praise Him. For His mercy endures.”

DANIEL AND SUSANNA

Among the Jews exiled in Babylon, there lived a wealthy man named Joakim, whose spouse was Susanna, a beautiful woman and a faithful follower of Jehovah.

Joakim, a civic minded man of prominence, lent his home and garden to the community for their courtroom. Two elders of the community served as judges.

When the judges sat in Joakim's home, presiding over the people's complaints, they, of course, noticed Susanna. As the days passed, they observed that when the meetings closed, Susanna took a walk in the garden. The elders, watching her graceful figure stroll along the flowered pathways, could hardly restrain their desire for her. Finally, each disclosed to the other his lustful thoughts, and together they conspired to possess her.

One day, as Susanna was bathing in the garden, they forced their way into her presence, demanding: "Give yourself to us. If you refuse, we shall witness that a young man has committed adultery with you here." With sinking heart, Susanna realized that if she did not submit, her execution was likely. But she fought them, screaming, and her cries brought her household servants and neighbors to her side.

The elders (the judges) asserted their lie. Susanna was placed on trial. She was forced to sit in the courtroom unveiled (although a sensitive maid of fragile temperament), subjected to the stares of lustful spectators. Her accusers, two reputable judges, testified that they personally observed Susanna and her young man in an act of adultery in the garden.

Susanna prayed. God heard her. As the court's judgment of execution of Susanna was being pronounced, Daniel spoke: "Wait," he asked the tribunal, "allow me to examine the witnesses separately, each outside the presence of the other." His request was granted, and after one of the witnesses had left the room, he asked the other:

"What was the kind of tree the pair were lying under when they committed adultery?"

"Mastick tree," came the prompt answer.

Then Daniel called for the second elder to be brought in. "Name the tree," he instructed the unsuspecting witness, "under which the lovers were lying when they committed the adultery."

And the man responded, "Holm tree".

All the people of the assembly turned upon the two elders. In accord with the Law of Moses, they put them to death.

DANIEL, BEL, AND THE SNAKE

Daniel was one of the administrators of King Cyrus, and once, during his attendance upon the King, the King asked him why he did not worship Bel. Bel was an idol which the King worshipped, to whom was given, each day, twelve bushels of flour, forty sheep, and fifty gallons of wine. Daniel explained to the King that Bel was not really god and did not really eat the food which was offered it daily.

Of course, the King did not like someone to say that the god which he worshipped was not god. Angrily, he proposed a test to determine whether Bel was god or not.

"If you can prove that Bel consumes the food offered him," said the King to his seventy priests, "then Daniel shall die; otherwise, that fate will be yours."

The priests placed the food in the temple, closed the door and requested that the King seal it. When they had left, Daniel re-entered the building and scattered ashes over the floor (for Daniel knew that the priests had a secret way into the temple by which they and their families entered, during the night, and consumed the bread and wine). The door was then closed and sealed and the King set the imprint of his ring upon it.

The next morning, the food was gone, alright, but Daniel pointed out to the King the footprints of the priests, their wives and children. Then and there, the King executed his priests and their families, and delivered Bel to Daniel. Daniel hammered it and its temple into rubble.

At about the same time, Daniel debunked the Babylonian snake worship myth. He simply fed cakes made of pitch, fat and hair to the enshrined snake. These expanded, once inside the snake's stomach, killing it.

The people were not happy with their king. They accused him of becoming a Jew, of destroying their idol gods. They demanded that he surrender Daniel to them. The king yielded and withdrew his protection, and they tossed Daniel into a lions' den containing seven hungry lions. There he lived for six days.

While Daniel was in the lions' den, God sought out Habakkuk, in Judaea, who was eating at the time, and instructed him to carry his meal of stew and bread to Daniel. Habakkuk protested that he didn't know the way to Babylon — but the angel simply picked him up by the hair of his head and, airborne, carried him to the Chaldean capital, setting him down at the lions' den.

Habakkuk identified himself to Daniel and handed over the food which God had commanded him to deliver. Daniel praised God and thanked Him for His kindness. God's angel returned Habakkuk home.

On the seventh day, the King entered the pit and found that Daniel was still alive.

“Great is Daniel’s God, the only God!” the King exclaimed. He removed Daniel from the den, and ordered that the men who had conspired against Daniel be thrown into it. The lions quickly ate these men.

THE PRAYER OF MANASSES

(King of Judah, while captive in Babylon)

O, God of Abraham, maker of Heaven, earth, ocean, mountain and valley; Thou art Most High; Thou hast promised repentance and forgiveness for sinners; repentance for sin was not necessary for Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, who were righteous, but is necessary for me, a sinner. I acknowledge my sins. Do not condemn me to the Abyss. I will praise Thee always.

THE FIRST BOOK OF THE MACCABEES

Alexander, King of Greece, defeated Darius, King of Persia, and occupied his territories. His armies dominated the world. All nations paid him tribute. At his death, his conquests were divided among his nobles, who were crowned as kings of their respective provinces.

Antiochus Epiphanes succeeded King Antiochus in 175 B.C. He continued his kingdom's strife with the Egyptian province. Once on his homeward return from conquest of Egyptian territory, he diverted his forces into Israel, entered Jerusalem itself, and pillaged the sacred Temple.

There was weeping throughout the land of Israel.

Two years later, the King sent his tax officials to Jerusalem. They, too, plundered the city, seized cattle, and killed many of the peoples. They built a heavily armed fort overlooking the city and garrisoned troops there, making themselves a constant threat to the inhabitants.

Then King Epiphanes decreed that the peoples of his province were to abandon their own laws and religions and follow the idol worship which he prescribed. Many of the Israelites complied with the decree; some did not. Mattathias, a priest, and his five sons, Joannan, Simon, Judas, Eleazar, and Jonathan, refused to participate in the pagan sacrificial rites. They lamented the new laws which prohibited circumcision, reading of the Book of the Testament, and participation in religious festival obligations. He and his sons, with as many followers as they could gather, fled into the mountains.

Another group of Jews, who had been hiding in the wilderness, were being run down by the King's soldiers. It was the Sabbath. Apprehensively, they held a council and decided that to defend themselves on the Sabbath would be profaning God. So, when the King's men overtook them, they offered no resistance. They, and their women and children, were butchered as they huddled together passively.

When the Mattathias' rebels received the news of how their friends had been slain on the Sabbath, they, too, held a meeting. They remarked to each other that if they insisted on refusing to fight on the Sabbath for fear of profaning God, the Gentiles would soon exterminate them, leaving no trace of them in the land. So they decided, Sabbath or not, that if battle were joined on the Sabbath, they would fight.

Mattathias led his followers in guerrilla activities throughout the country, destroying the Gentile altars, circumcising the uncircumcised Israelites through threats and force, and making raids upon the enemy soldiers. The number of Mattathias' commandos grew. Just before his death Mattathias appointed his son, Judas Maccabaeus, his field commander, and Simon his

counselor, to continue the fight against the Gentiles.

3: Judas Maccabaeus increased the number and size of the guerrilla sorties. Intending to put an end to the harassment, Apollonius assembled an army of Gentiles and Samaritans and tracked down Judas' rebels. By that time, Judas had mobilized his followers, and he met Apollonius' thrust with a counter charge of his own. The Gentiles yielded and ran, and the Jews pursued and slew them. Their victory netted much booty, including weapons, and even the sword of Apollonius. Judas claimed the sword for himself. It was his companion the remainder of his life.

Judas' men defeated Seron, Syrian commander (his ranks included many defiled Jews), in the Beth-horon plain. Meanwhile, King Antiochus, realizing that he did not have sufficient funds for a campaign against Judas' outlaw band, appointed Lysias head of the territories comprising the land of Canaan, and commenced a march of his forces into Persia in a campaign to collect tribute from his provinces. This was 165 B.C.

Under Lysias' orders, General Ptolemee invaded Judaea with 47,000 troops, intending the annihilation of the Maccabaeus army and the devastation of the land. At Mizpah, Judas' meager troops fasted, wore sackcloth, and prayed. They sprinkled ashes on their heads, tore their clothing, and mourned. Then they organized themselves and prepared to resist the invasion.

A contingent of the Gentile troops had separated themselves from their main forces; the Jews saw their mistake and engaged them in battle. About 3,000 Gentile soldiers fell and died under the fierce commandos' charge. The remainder of the army of Ptolemee returned to Lysias. The next year, Lysias sent 65,000 troops against Judaea; again, Judas, with a force of only 10,000 men, met him and crushed him. Lysias retreated to Antioch.

Judas turned to the task of restoring Jerusalem. He stationed his own troops in the Temple area (but not in the Citadel), demolished the altars which had become defiled by Gentile use and removed their stones from the Temple place. His men, assisted by the people, rebuilt the gates, swept out the Temple and made a new altar and new holy vessels. They appointed priests (who were without blemish) to make burnt peace and thank offerings to God. They built a fortress around Mount Zion and stationed troops there to defend against Gentile attacks.

When the nations, from near and far, heard that the Jews had rebuilt their Holy Place, they began a campaign of killing and butchery of the Jewish people who lived among them. So the troops of Judas made raids on many of the neighboring hostile strongholds. They won victories at Idumaea, Bean, and Jazer (Ammon).

But in Tyre, Sidon, Ptolemais, and Gilead, the Jews were threatened with extermination by superior Gentile forces who

occupied those cities. They appealed to Judas for help. Judas divided his command, sending Simon with 3,000 of his men into Galilee, while he and his brother invaded Gilead. Both armies were successful, and the Jews killed thousands of the enemy, took their spoil from the dead, and returned with their booty, captive wives and children.

During this campaign, Timotheus, an Ammonite, lost several battles to Judas. The liberated Jews of the conquered cities were escorted to Jerusalem. At the base of Mount Zion, liberator and liberated celebrated, offered sacrifices on the altar, and gave thanks that they had not lost a single man in the campaigns.

Josephus and Azarias, seeking fame, lead a contingent of men against Gorgias, in Jamnia. Two thousand Jews were killed. Meanwhile, Judas was burning the Gentile forts at Hebron, and invading and plundering the lands of the Philistines.

6: King Antiochus, in Persia, received word that his Judaeen invasions were failures. His attempts to subdue the cities of Persia had likewise come to a dismal end. He grieved; he realized and admitted that the reason for his defeats was his wrong in robbing the Temples of Jerusalem. There, in 163 B.C., he died.

Young Antiochus (Eupator) succeeded his father, and when he learned of Judas' siege of the Citadel garrison in Jerusalem, he sent 120,000 men, infantry and cavalry, and 32 elephants into Judaea. Judas retreated, setting his forces up at Bathzacharias. The battle was joined. During the fighting, Eleazar Avaran slashed his way through an enemy company to an elephant wearing royal robes and pierced the elephant from underneath. The huge animal, fatally wounded, fell upon Eleazar, crushing him.

The King's cavalry, his elephants, his skilled and trained warriors, their superior equipment, gold and bronze and iron, were too much for the forces of the Jews and they fell into retreat. The King lay siege to Jerusalem. The defenders valiantly resisted the siege-engines, flame-throwers, catapults, slings, and assaults. But there was no food which would enable them to make a prolonged defense of their Holy City because at that time, in obedience to the holy Sabbath laws, the land lay fallow.

Still, the King was having problems, too. News came to him that Philip, who coveted his throne, was making overtures in Antioch to gain control of the kingdom. His commander, Lysias, proposed to him that they make a truce with the Jews and return forthwith. They engineered a settlement whereby the Jews were given the privilege of following their own laws and customs. After he had entered the city, however, and saw the strength of the fort, the King ordered the walls demolished. Then he departed, hastily, for Antioch. There he met and defeated the upstart, Philip.

In 161 B.C., the Roman, Demetrius, son of Seleucus, declared

himself king in Asia Minor. At his order, Antiochus and Lysias were executed. A delegation of Israel Jews, lead by Alcimus, promptly petitioned Demetrius to take action against the Judas Maccabaeus' guerrillas. The King selected Alcimus and Bacchides to lead the army which he sent into Judaea.

Alcimus, as High Priest, sought truces, and when truces were granted, he betrayed the trust and engaged in mass executions of those who had allowed him to come in peace. Resistance to the decrees of Alcimus increased and he withdrew to the King, who sent Nicanor, an experienced battle commander.

Nicanor entered Jerusalem and promised the priests that, unless Judas and his men surrendered to him, he would burn down the Temple. The priests congregated in the Temple and prayed that God would bring failure and death to Nicanor. The Jews triumphed and Nicanor was killed. Judas' forces were joined by volunteer guerrilla troops from the surrounding cities and towns. Not a man of Nicanor's army survived. They returned Nicanor's severed head and right hand to Jerusalem, and hung them up in a public place.

Judas, realizing that the Romans had conquered India, Media, Lydia, Persia, Spain, and Greece, sought a treaty with the Roman Empire. The Romans were pleased; the parties promised each other mutual support and evidenced their agreement upon brass tables. At the same time, the Romans dispatched a message to Demetrius threatening war if Demetrius persisted in harassing the Jews.

9: In 160 B.C., Demetrius sent Bacchides and Alcimus with 22,000 troops against Jerusalem and Berea. Judas, with a hand-picked force of 3,000 men, joined battle. He was slain; his army was routed.

Bacchides now divided the country and chose quislings to preside over it. The oppression of the Jews continued with renewed vigor. Jonathan Maccabaeus assumed leadership of the rebel army.

On the Sabbath, Bacchides routed Jonathan's forces, which fled in disarray across the Jordan River. Bacchides then occupied the towns with troops. He took many of the favorite sons of the various cities hostages and held them in the Jerusalem tower.

In 159 B.C., Alcimus proposed to destroy the Temple. As he was giving the order for the beginning of the razing, he suffered an attack of palsy and died.

Meanwhile, Jonathan and his men were building a fort in the desert near Bethbasi. Defenses invite attacks by offenses and it was not long before Bacchides besieged Jonathan's fort. Jonathan's brother, Simon, lead a small group of men in commando raids against the besiegers. Finally, Bacchides and Jonathan agreed to an armistice whereby Jewish prisoners were

freed, and Bacchides withdrew.

In 152 B.C., Alexander Epiphanes and King Demetrius contested for possession of the kingdom. Demetrius sent envoys to Jonathan promising alliance of his forces with the Jews. King Alexander sent messages of friendship to Jonathan with gifts of a purple robe and a gold crown, and an appointment as High Priest.

Demetrius sent word that no further taxes or tribute would be required from the Jews and ceded the Jerusalem tower to Jonathan's forces. He promised a limit upon the number of Jews who should be drafted for military service and provided that they should receive regular army pay. He gave three districts of Samaria to Judaea and pledged gifts of silver and gold to the Temple treasury.

Jonathan and his council doubted the sincerity of these offerings. They chose to ally with Alexander.

Alexander defeated Demetrius. His first act as king was to seek alliance with King Ptolemy of Egypt and to bind the alliance by marriage of himself to Cleopatra, Ptolemy's daughter. Jonathan was invited to their conference, and he went. The king clothed Jonathan in purple and allowed him to sit at his table. He appointed him Duke, his administrator over Judaea.

In 147 B.C., Demetrius II, the son of Demetrius, arrived in Antioch and claimed the kingdom. He appointed Apollonius governor of Samaria-Syrian forces, and sent them into Judaea. Jonathan fled to the hills with assembled guerrilla forces and was soon harassing the garrisons which Apollonius had established. Upon confrontation of forces, Jonathan's men triumphed, slaying 8,000 of the enemy. They returned to Jerusalem with their spoils.

King Alexander sent Jonathan encouragement, a gold clasp and governorship of additional territories.

11: King Ptolemy mustered a great army and left for Syria with the announced intention of joining Alexander there. But, as he passed through the cities, he left a garrison of soldiers in each one. He was acquiring dominion over Alexander's territory as he proceeded northward; Alexander did not realize what was happening.

When Ptolemy arrived in Antioch, he declared himself King of Egypt and of Asia, also, and now Alexander saw the King's scheme, but it was too late. Ptolemy's forces quickly routed Alexander's army. Alexander, himself, fled, but into the Arab camp, where he was beheaded. Ptolemy died in 145 B.C., and Demetrius became king.

Jonathan led a delegation to meet and petition Demetrius at Ptolemais. Demetrius allowed Jonathan the rule of the land of Judaea and three Samaritan districts; he released these districts from the payment of further tribute. He agreed to withdraw the

troops from the Citadel, and Jonathan, in turn, pledged Jewish troops to rally to his assistance whenever needed. Shortly thereafter, Jonathan did send several thousand of the Jewish soldiers to Antioch to assist Demetrius in putting down a civil rebellion.

But then Demetrius refused to honor his promises to the Jews.

And so, soon after, when the rebellious citizens were again rampaging, Demetrius could not command or beget support. Young Antiochus, a child, was given his seat. Antiochus sent Jonathan a gold plate, purple cloth, gold buckle, gold cup, and an army commission for Simon. Jonathan and his brother then began the conquest of several cities in and about Judaea.

Some of Demetrius' forces set out to stop them. Jonathan's troops, unprepared for armed resistance of this magnitude, came upon them in the Asor plains. His men, except for his officers, Mattathias and Judas, deserted him. Jonathan prayed. Single-handedly, he went against the enemy, causing them to retreat, and when Jonathan's deserters saw the enemy fleeing, they joined their commander in pursuit. They killed 3,000 Gentiles.

Back in Jerusalem, Jonathan set about consolidating his position with the Romans. He made a report of Jewish activities in the support of Roman rule, and requested a renewal of the Roman alliance. Numenius and Antipater were dispatched as diplomats to deliver the message. Rome's answer was reassuring.

He contacted Sparta, also. The Spartans answered, pledging their brotherhood, announcing that newly discovered papers in their kingdom showed the Lacedemonians (Spartans) and Jews were kinsmen, descendants of Abraham.

Again, Jonathan chased Demetrius' forces and marched through the country around Damascus. Simon took and held Joppa. Jonathan began rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, attempting to set apart the Citadel fortress from the city proper and thereby separate it from access to the commerce of the city, to food or clothing.

Then one Trypho, adviser to King Antiochus, tricked Jonathan into coming to Ptolemais without sufficient supporting troops. He was captured; one thousand of his men were killed. The Gentiles of Samaria were heartened by this and plotted to eradicate the Jews from their land.

Simon rallied his kinsmen in Jerusalem and the fight was continued. Trypho's battalions were the superior forces, however, and he marched through the nation, devastating the land, while Simon and his men helplessly watched. Trypho executed Jonathan before returning to Antiochus, and Israel mourned. Simon built seven pyramids at Modin as a memorial to his father, mother and brothers, all of whom were lost in the rebellions.

Simon and King Demetrius allied themselves, and as a result

Jerusalem was excused from paying taxes to the King. In 142 B.C., there was freedom of the Jews from the Gentile boot. Simon trampled Gaza. The starving soldiers of the Citadel Tower in Jerusalem surrendered to him. Sparta renewed its pledge of friendship to the Jews. There was peace between Rome and Judaea.

The people, grateful to the Maccabaeus family, prepared a monument on Mount Zion and attached brass tablets eulogizing Simon and his brothers. They appointed Simon High Priest, General, and protector.

In 138 B.C., King Antiochus declared his friendship to Jerusalem and Judah, promised protection, and supported the promise with military might. He lay siege to Dor where Tryphus presided. But overnight, he changed. He demanded tribute. He threatened war against Simon's government. Then Tryphus escaped Dor, and the king appointed Cendebeus to war upon the Judeans, while he pursued Tryphus.

16: To prevent the oppression of the people by Cendebeus' troops, Simon appointed his sons, Judas and John, commanders of the Jewish army and sent them against the new enemy. The king's men were routed, but Judas was wounded. The victory was dimmed by the death of Simon, betrayed by his countryman, Ptolemeus, who coveted Simon's office. An attempt was also made to assassinate John, son of Simon, but John learned of the plot and escaped.

As for the rest of the acts of John, his wars, and worthy deeds, behold, these are written in the chronicles of his priesthood, from the time he was made High Priest after his father.

THE SECOND BOOK OF THE MACCABEES

124 B.C. A letter from the Jews of Jerusalem to Aristobulus, King Ptolemy's servant, and the Egyptian Jews:

Thank God, King Antiochus was killed in Persia as he prepared to marry a temple goddess.

We, ourselves, will keep our Temple purification ritual soon. You, also, will be allowed to have a part in our Feast of Tabernacles.

You may recall that when our forefathers were deported to Persia, our priests concealed some of the altar fire in a dry pit. After many years, Nehemiah returned from exile; he and his assistants attempted to withdraw the fire from the pit. They found, not fire, but a thick, watery substance which they sprinkled upon the altar. When the hot sun rays fell upon the substance, the altar wood burst into flame, consuming the sacrifice. The liquid was naphtha.

We have documents showing that it was Jeremiah who ordered the fire stowed away. It was Jeremiah who hid the Tabernacle tent, Ark, and incense altar in the mountains. The document says that Jeremiah prophesied that the articles would remain hidden until the time of God's coming.

These events are verified by Nehemiah's writings. Judas has collected our books which had been previously lost and misplaced (on account of the war); we will be glad to send you any that you might need. God has salvaged His people and given to them the heritage, kingdom, priesthood, and the sanctuary as He promised them. For His deliverance, we give thanks.

Jason of Cyrene has written five books covering the activities of the Maccabaeus which we will attempt to recite, by abridging, in one. In addition to his accounts of the wars with the various kings, Jason described the victories achieved by the various ghosts, or monsters, sent from Heaven to assist Jews in their battles. These phantom creatures intimidated the whole country, chased barbarous multitudes, put back the Temple into the hands of God's people, and liberated Jerusalem.

3: While Onias was High Priest, Simon, a traitor, reported to Apollonius, and through him, the King, that the Jews had secreted and hidden silver, gold, and jewels in the Jewish Temple at Jerusalem, for which they had not accounted to the King. The King appointed Heliodorus to investigate.

In Jerusalem, the Jewish priests admitted to Heliodorus that a little silver and gold had not been included in their inventory sent the King, but they maintained that that which was withheld was being held in trust for widows and orphans. Heliodorus decided to find out for himself how much gold and silver had been stashed by the Jews. He entered their Temple.

An anguished cry of alarm sprang from the lips of the priests, was taken up by the people in the streets, and carried into the homes of the Jews throughout the city. The priests fell prostrate on the ground before the Temple, wailing; half naked women ran from their homes, clothed only in sackcloth skirts; virgins came from their places of confinement to the walls of their domain; everyone, young and old, male and female, raised their hands to Heaven and called upon the Almighty to stop Heliodorus, a Gentile, from defiling the Temple.

The Lord of Spirits heard their spontaneous plea and at once sent a monstrous horse, fiercesomely adorned and bearing a phantom, terrifying rider clad in golden battle dress, accompanied by two muscular giants dressed in shining ornaments. While the horse attacked Heliodorus, the two powerfully built ghosts beat him with whips. He fell to the ground unconscious and bleeding.

The Jews praised God, but Onias, at the request of Heliodorus' guardsmen, prayed to the Most High that Heliodorus might recover. When Heliodorus was revived, he offered sacrifices upon the Temple altar. Then he returned to the King and reported these events, recommending that the Jewish treasury be left alone. And so it was that the Temple treasury was saved.

After Seleucus died his successor, Antiochus Epiphanes, appointed Jason High Priest. Jason patterned the life of the Jews after the Greek ways. An athletic arena was constructed and young men were required to participate in the activities therein. Jewish laws were abandoned; foreign customs were followed; the priests neglected their Temple duties; and sacrificing of animals was largely discontinued.

Apollonius (son of Menestheus) visited Jerusalem. Menelaus, through bribery of the King's officials, obtained appointment as High Priest, replacing Jason. He used some of the gold vessels from the Temple for these bribes. He hired the assassination of Onias, and when he was accused and placed on trial, he bribed Ptolemee to convince the King to release him. The accusers were executed and Menelaus continued his evil ways.

When Epiphanes proposed a second campaign against Egypt, signs of woe, disaster, and victory appeared in the skies — apparitions, phantoms, ghosts in the form of galloping horsemen, swordsmen, cavalry, and spear throwers. These ghosts and phantoms were seen by multitudes.

Jason, with some of his fellow Jews, commenced a civil war centering in Jerusalem. Menelaus had sought refuge there with his guardsmen and several of his fellow kinsmen. Skirmishes could not be avoided. Many of the Jews on each side were slaughtered, and Jason's conspirators were thrashed. Jason fled to Egypt and died in exile.

Epiphanes, angered that the Jews engaged in civil war, marshalled a contingent of troops and thundered into Jerusalem, killing the young, old, women, and children, without discretion. Forty thousand Jews were killed, forty thousand enslaved.

And as if this were not enough, the Gentile King himself boldly and disrespectfully entered the sacred Temple. He impounded the sacred vessels. He was spared the fate of Heliodorus by virtue of the fact that the Jewish people had been guilty of many sins. Therefore, God, angry at His people again, did not molest him. The King departed for Antioch with the Temple treasures, leaving behind him a brutal governor, Philip.

Epiphanes captained Apollonius to exterminate the Jews. Apollonius carried out the assignment by entering Jerusalem under a peaceful guise, and then massacring the people who had congregated there to celebrate the Sabbath day.

Judas Maccabaeus escaped while the Gentiles engaged in their bawdy pleasures of wine, women and song within the sacred Temple itself. While the Gentiles dedicated the Temple and Mount Zion to the Olympian god, Jupiter (Zeus), while drunkenness, fornication, and adultery abounded within the Temple confines, and while the Jerusalem Jew was restrained from observance of the Sabbath or traditional holidays, Judas was assembling his followers.

6: During this time, young mothers were thrown from cliffs for the crime of having their babies circumcised. Other Jews were executed for failing to follow Greek ways. Some were forced to eat the entrails of Greek sacrificial victims. Eleazar was scourged for failing to eat pork. He could have avoided the beating if only he had eaten other meat, declaring it to be pork, but he would not. Only his death stilled the whip of his oppressor.

A mother and her seven sons appeared before the king. They had refused to eat pork. One of the sons was selected, scalped, cut, maimed, and fried in a pan in the presence of his mother and brothers. The next brother was selected and given an opportunity to save himself by eating pork. When he refused, he was also tormented and roasted. And then the third, fourth, fifth, sixth, and seventh were similarly slain, one by one. Not once during this ordeal did the mother falter. She encouraged her sons to die rather than yield. Finally, she, too, was subjected to the butcher's knife.

They declared that they were being punished for their own sins.

Judas finally assembled his outlaw group and began his attacks upon the Gentiles in the cities. Success brought new recruits. Liberated peoples of these cities joined his army. With confidence in God's help, he confronted and defeated Ptolemeus' army of 20,000. He slaughtered the troops of Timotheus and Bacchides. He divided the spoils of battle among the widows, orphans, disabled, and elderly equally with the fighting men.

9: In Persia, Antiochus received news of the Maccabaeus victories and began his return homeward, promising calamities upon the Jews. Immediately, God caused him to suffer severe and excruciating pain in his abdomen, dislodging him from his chariot. Half paralyzed with bowel pain and broken body, he continued to curse the Jew as he was placed on a stretcher.

His skin fell away from bone; worms attacked his decaying, stinking flesh. He began to realize his mortal limitations. His thoughts turned to rebuilding the Temple, replacing holy vessels, and freeing the Jews from the restrictions of his laws. While thereby suffering, he wrote and sent to the Jews a letter recounting his affliction and his experiences, requesting their goodwill of himself and his son, and wishing them well.

And then the scoundrel died.

Maccabaeus continued his fight. The city and Temple of Jerusalem were liberated, and the event celebrated. Gorgias was appointed governor of Judaea by King Eupator, and he vigorously renewed the suppression of Jewish insurrection.

The Jews defeated the forces of Timotheus again. This time (after putting on sackcloths, pouring dirt over their heads, and praying to their Lord), they were aided by five gigantic phantom horsemen riding golden-bridled horses, who appeared from the sky and came to the forefront of the Jewish troops, firing arrows and bolts of lightning into the enemy formations.

Lysias, the King's commander, led 80,000 Gentile troops in an invasion of Judaea. There they met the Jewish army led by Maccabaeus — and a ghost, a white knight upon a white horse wearing golden sword and shield — and were overcome. The retreat of Lysias and his men became a rout. Lysias agreed to a truce. So, in 164 B.C., the Jews were given the right to follow their own laws, customs, and ways.

Assurances to the same effect were sent them by the Romans.

In some of the cities, such as Joppe and Jamnia, the Gentile townspeople, who were in the majority, carried out plans of exterminating Jews. In one case, Jews were carried out to sea in boats, and the boats then sunk. Judas' outlaws raided such cities, not only to punish the Gentiles, but also to free refugee Jews.

Judas won victory after victory. Sometimes his forces were led by apparitions and ghosts. Sometimes they were led by him, alone, he and his men singing hymns and playing instruments as they marched into the fray.

(Once, when a segment of his command was defeated, examination was made of the battle site and it was discovered that each and every soldier that had been slain in the battle carried an idol of Jamnia. It was obvious why they had died.)

Time and time again, the King's garrisons were defeated by Judas and his men. Once, his campaign against the Jews was

interrupted when Philip in Antioch attempted to take his throne, and he had to return home, leaving Maccabaeus temporary governor of the area.

14: The King did not honor his treaty which he had made with the Jews.

In 161 B.C., the quisling Alcimus urged Demetrius, son of Seleucus, to enforce the peace in the rebellious Jewish provinces. Demetrius sent Nicanor with an army led by elephants into Judaea. Neither the King's commander nor the Jews could gain an advantage, and the fighting ended in an armistice.

The King was unhappy with the truce to which Nicanor had agreed and ordered him to continue the campaign. So Nicanor captured the Temple and promised the priests that he would level it unless Judas was delivered to him.

Nicanor planned his campaign so that the deciding contest would begin upon the Sabbath.

On the eve of battle, Maccabaeus was approached by the deceased former High Priest, Onias, who appeared in a vision in human form, in the act of praying for the survival of the Jews. Next, there came an elderly gentleman of obvious refinement, introduced by Onias to Maccabaeus as the prophet, Jeremiah. Jeremiah handed Judas a golden sword, saying: "Smite your adversaries."

Thus encouraged, Judas and his men rushed to fight the Nicanor battalions, and they won; with prayers and exaltations, they slaughtered their enemy. Nicanor was killed. His head was severed and returned to Jerusalem where it was displayed from the fortress wall.

Since then, Jerusalem has belonged to the Jew.

Comment

INTRODUCTION TO NEW TESTAMENT

Recent fossil discoveries have elicited scientific guess that man existed upon this planet 3,500,000 years ago. Prior to these finds, archeologists and anthropologists speculated that man first arrived here about 1,000,000 B.C. Other opinions as to man's first appearance on earth vary, from 500,000 B.C. Neanderthal Man, to 50,000 B.C. Cro-Magnon, or even as late as 25,000 B.C.

Whatever his history, man first began recording accounts of himself just 5,000 years past (effectively, since about 1,000 B.C.). Even then, only those occupying a small part of the earth's surface (Egypt to India) shared the discovery of communication by writing.

One of the first subjects upon which man wrote was his religion. Some of his first written words were about, or to, an Egyptian, Assyrian, or Indian God.

In India, those first writings claimed a religion already ancient, by their reckoning. Their Brahmin of 3,000 B.C. was the "world-soul" from whom came Vishnu, the Supreme Creator, and Shiva, the Lord of Darkness. Even at that early date, they had already formulated a caste system based upon a belief in reincarnation, whereby one may advance from a lower caste (class or circumstance) in one life into a higher caste in the next. Their gods cavorted and fought with each other, with bountiful supplies of angels and imps contributing to the adventures.

Egypt's meager records (perhaps the world's first) reflect that their chief deity at the time, 3,000 B.C., was the sun. Although Babylon and Assyria worshipped a multitude of gods, most of which were idols representing some element of nature, they, too, worshipped the sun.

They believed the earth to be flat, of course, covered by a hard crystal sky with holes through which gods peeped. The sun, as everyone knew, rose in the morning, set in the evening, and traveled through the earth along the underground river during the night so that it appeared in the east at the appointed time next day.

To these ancient, but not so long ago, writers, Zoroastrinism was unknown. Zeus, Mercury, Ahura Mazda, Buddha, and Yahweh (or Jehovah) were unborn ideas.

There was a god in the wind, lightning, hail, storm, mountain, cave, sky, stars, birth and death and the men of that day paid homage to them all. They pushed and dragged their stinking, terrorized animals onto their altars, made the kill ritually, usually by cutting the throat of the victim, washed themselves in its blood, and feasted upon the meat. Sometimes the "sacrifice" was a human being.

Their writings indicate little change in their knowledge or practice for 2,000 years. Then there began the stories of the magic of the Medes, the power of Zeus, and the fidelity of tribal deities. The Hebrews declared their loyalty to an abstract God called Yahweh, who punished or rewarded them according to their deeds. The god Apollo was born to a mortal woman, Leto, conceived by the supreme creator, Zeus. Dionysus in Rome (known also as Bacchus, god of wine) died for humanity and was born again and again; his following advocated a temperate life, reward for good, punishment for evil, rebirth, heaven and hell.

In the 6th Century B.C., the living religions sprang up, prospered, and spread. In India, Buddhism set forth its commandments of the way of the good life and advanced to the east. Confucianism and Taoism became Chinese custom. Zoroaster's views (supra, page 152) accompanied Persia's conquests of most of the known world. Judah's priests pronounced Yahweh to be the Supreme God with omniscient characteristics.

Apollo, son of Zeus, son of the Sun, the "good shepherd", "healer", "prophet", "teacher", was adored throughout Greece and Asia Minor.

Sophisticated religious schooling was available in the 5th Century B.C. The Pythagorians, in Southern Italy, taught obedience, silence, fasting, simple dress, immortality and the transmigration of souls. The Ionian schools, following mysterious ritual, missionaried similar ideas in Ephesus and throughout Asia Minor.

Plato's *Phaedo*, about 450 B.C., sought to show by logical argument the existence of the soul; he argued persuasively, in philosophical debate, that the soul, unseen, existed before death, and would continue after it was separated from the body by death; that the dead would be reborn to receive a reward for an ascetic, temperate life or punishment for a wicked one. The Greek soldiers of Alexander's armies carried Plato's ideas with them throughout the world.

In the 4th Century, B.C., Krsna was a popular deity of the Hindu. The traders and camel drivers of caravans returning from the East along the Kings Highway through Persia, Chaldea, Assyria, and Judah to Egypt repeated the mysterious creed, myths and legends about him which they had heard in the strange land (India).

Krsna was a 6th Century B.C. reincarnation, they said, of Vishnu, the Supreme Creator. His coming was prophesied. He entered the womb of Devaki, a chaste woman, and when her time had come, he was born to her amidst rejoicing and singing of the heavenly host. Astrologers, following unusually bright and active stars, attended his birth; herdsman brought gifts.

The infant, Krsna, experienced the purification processes

commanded by the scripture (Vedas), and escaped the search of the hostile ruler (who feared his coming) who slew multitudes of newborn infants in the community in an attempt to erase him.

It was said that this supreme personality of the Godhead came to earth in human form to rid the world of sin and to invite mankind to his home in Paradise; he taught that man was to have a new birth, a new body. Around desert campfires, caravan storytellers narrated the Indians' creed that Krsna was, is, and shall be; that he is "Truth", "God of Light", the healer, exorcist and teacher. He raised various people from the dead.

His destiny, so they said, is the defeat of Lord Siva, Lord of Darkness, and his demons. His story is told in the sacred Bhagavad Gita, and the sacred scriptures (Vedas) sing his praises.

The similarities existing between Krsna and later New Testament works is evident. There are other parallels which may have become identified with the Christian story we are about to read which may be briefly mentioned.

By the first and second centuries, Kings and Emperors (Caesar, Pomperius, Augustus, many others), each, claimed to be the son of a god. Legends developed around beloved religious leaders, such as Apollonius of Tyaneus.

Appollonius was a philosopher, a bachelor teacher, active somewhere between 3 B.C. to 97 A.D. He developed a doctrine to the effect that when a man was purified by a cleansing of the heart so God could enter, he was "saved". He advocated temperance and carried his message from Asia Minor to Egypt, Rome, Babylon and points between.

The legends say his birth was prophesied; a thunderbolt announced his arrival to parents of nobility; he was a gifted child, interrupting meetings of the Greek teachers in order to correct or teach them. He was a healer, and an exorcist; he restored the dead to life on divers occasions. He was "Truth" and "Light", son of a God.

He was imprisoned, given up for dead, and after three days, astounded his followers by appearing before them. When he was placed upon trial, he declared his immortality.

* * * * *

Despite the similarities, only one of the popular creeds founded before the birth of Christ competed with Christianity with any degree of success. That movement was called:

MITHRAISM.

Somewhere between the first and sixth centuries, B.C., the worship of Mithra began. The Zoroastrinian schools, principally Persian (supra, page 152), predicted the coming of a savior, to be born of a fifteen year old virgin impregnated with the seed of Ahura Mazda, the one wise Lord, without intercourse.

Mithraists proclaimed that He, Mithra, the savior, had come.

The Persians carried this creed with them into Babylon, Assyria, and into crossroads cities of Asia Minor such as Ephesus and Corinth. Mithraites spread this gospel. By 68 B.C., it was entrenched in Rome itself.

For almost four hundred years, the religion competed with Christianity for survival. In 300 A.D., Constantine, the Roman Emperor, abandoned the faith and embraced Christianity. His successor, Julian, 350 A.D., renounced Christianity to worship Mithra. Each regime persecuted the competing believers.

From 367 A.D. to 394 A.D., the Christians, favored by the reigning power, set upon the Mithraists with executions, temple burnings, and legislation. This drove the religion underground, and for all practical purposes abolished it, although some remnants survived in parts of Europe until the Middle Ages.

Despite their intense rivalry, the religions' teachings were much the same. Each claimed a savior (Jesus or Mithra) who would, at the end of time, fight and defeat the Lord of Darkness (Satan or Ahriman), restore the dead and judge mankind. Each believed in Heaven as the reward for good and a fiery hell the end for the wicked. Each of them preached brotherly love, encouraged ascetism as the key to the good life, and the immortality of the soul.

The Mithraists set aside Sunday as Holy. So did the Christians. Mithra's birthday, December 25, was a Mithraist holy day. The Christians revered December 25 as the day of the birth of Jesus. Mithra was the mediator between God and man; to Christians, Jesus was the intercessor. Mithra's initiation ordinances required that one must be baptized, a custom endorsed by Christians and claimed as part of their necessary ritual. Mithra's worshippers participated in a dining communion service, the Christians in the Lord's Supper.

Both Mithraist and Christian employed the use of Holy Water in rites of worship, and their separate scriptures contained similar stories of creation, the first couple on earth, and the flood.

Legends asserted that Mithra's coming was predicted by the prophets, and his birth announced by heavenly voices and bright stars. The infant was visited by shepherds and the authorities attempted to destroy him. Once, he shot an arrow into a rock, bringing forth a stream of water. At age thirty, he received a vision, visited Heaven, returned, and began his ministry. Ahriman tempted him with promises of worldly goods and he stood firm. New Testament scripture clothes Jesus with similar circumstances.

Both religions claimed "divinely inspired" scripture.

* * * * *

In the day Christianity was born and began its struggle for supremacy over Mithra and Zoroaster's Ahura Mazda, the Greeks' Zeus, the Roman's Jupiter, the mysteries and sorceries of the East, sun worship, pagan deities, and Judaism, man still had scant knowledge of the workings of the universe.

Even the most intelligent assumed the world to be flat, the winds manipulated by a God or Gods, and the storm the wrath of supernatural beings. Superstition was the rule. Wise and powerful men sought advice from sorcerers who could read God's "sign" outlined in the entrails of a frog, or the future from flights of birds released from cages. Commencement of military campaigns, appointments of governors, or planting of crops awaited such "signs" from God.

There were monsters in the sea and upon the land, and demons lurked in every cave and behind every bush on every mountain, and even in the air. To man of 1 B.C., stopping the sun in its course, or the erasing of a portion of the heavens, while not ordinary, was no great feat. Despite enlightenment through philosophy and emphasized idealistic religious thought, the man of that day still dragged terrified animals into his temples for slaughter and congregational consumption.

The Jews, like the Hindu in the east, lived with innumerable taboos (over 600). Many of these restraints were vague, changed, and expanded often. It was impossible for the Hebrew to live an ordinary existence without violation of some religious prohibition. He was constantly on guard against corrupting himself. For example, Jews would not touch the property, nor enter the home, of a Gentile lest they be defiled.

And in such a world, in Ephesus, and Collosus, and throughout Asia Minor, there began the circulation, mostly by word of mouth, of the account of the Jewish carpenter, Jesus of Nazareth, now set forth in the New Testament Gospels.

Comment

ORIGIN OF THE SYNOPTIC GOSPELS

At first, Paul's letters (and copies thereof) began their circulation among the cities of Asia Minor. In the meeting places, people repeated the stories they had been told concerning the life and activities of Jesus. Some of the scribes began collecting and recording these related events.

Of the Synoptic Gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke), Mark was first to set down, from various sources, accounts of the Nazarean carpenter. His record, initially produced about 68 A.D., reflects recourse to accounts having Palestinian-Syrian-Antiochene origins, so scholars claim. They assert that Mark relied upon some particular source which they are able to recognize from context and form, but whose author is unknown. They have labeled this unknown contributor simply source "Q".

Who was Mark? He was not an eyewitness. Some said he was Peter's friend, and through him learned much of the Jesus epic which he later set forth in his gospel. Was he the John Mark of the Acts? Or simply a Roman Christian of that day?

Notwithstanding the mystery of his identity, Mark's work was influential. Matthew, although reputed to be an eyewitness, copied the contents of Mark and incorporated it into his own as his account. Luke also appropriated Mark's version as his own, though Mark, whoever he was, could not have been a witness to the events he related.

Ninety per cent. of Mark is in Matthew; Luke copies more than fifty per cent. Less than five per cent. of Mark's material is omitted by both Luke and Matthew. Words and sentences are often identical in all three versions. The general conclusion is that Matthew and Luke, written 70-95 A.D., are revisions, corrections, and expansions of Mark.

The guess is that Matthew was a Pharisee, probably a teacher of Jewish doctrine, possibly the apostle, Matthew, of whom the gospels speak. Luke was a Gentile who came into contact with Paul and other proponents of the new religion. His notes of the passion narratives and the infancy and ministry of Jesus were beautifully reproduced in the gospel attributed to him.

It is generally accepted that both Matthew and Luke used sources other than Mark for their work. As did Mark, both copied from another source which researchers call "Q". Other common sources were referred to as "L" and "M" sources. It is said that Midrashic infancy additions, Roman tradition, and Caesaerean influences are also evident.

An attempt will be made to combine the accounts of Matthew, Mark, and Luke, the first three Gospels, giving only one account of the story where the three Gospel versions appear to be substantially identical.

MATTHEW, MARK AND LUKE

Luke sets forth the antecedents of Jesus thusly: Jesus, Joseph, Heli, Matthat, Levi, Melchi, Janna, Joseph, Mattathias, Amos, Naum, Esli, Nagge, Maath, Mattathias, Semei, Joseph, Juda, Joanna, Rhesa, Zorobabel, Salathiel, Neri, Melchi, Addi, Cosam, Elmodam, Er, Jose, Eliezer, Jorim, Matthat, Levi, Simeon, Juda, Joseph, Jonan, Eliakim, Melea, Menan, Mattatha, Nathan, *David* — Jesse, Obed, Booz, Salmon, Naasson, Aminadab, Aram, Esrom, Phares, Juda, Jacob, Isaac, Abraham, Thara, Nachor, Saruch, Ragau, Phalec, Heber, Sala, Cainan, Arphaxad, Sem, Noe, Lamech, Mathusala, Enoch, Jared, Maleleel, Cainan, Enos, Seth, Adam, God.

Matthew genealogy account:

Jesus, Joseph, Jacob, Matthan, Eleazar, Eliud, Achim, Sadoc, Azor, Eliakim, Abiud, Zorobabel, Salathiel, Jechonias, Josias, Amon, Manasses, Ezekias, Achaz, Joatham, Ozias, Joram, Josaphat, Asa, Abia, Roboam, Solomon, *David* — Jesse, Obed, Booz, Salmon, Naasson, Aminadab, Aram, Esrom, Phares, Judas, Jacob, Isaac, Abraham.

Luke, in a letter to Theophilus, reports:

Once, during the reign of King Herod of Judea, Zacharias, an elderly priest, was attending his Temple duties when Gabriel, the angel, appeared before him. "I know that Elizabeth, your spouse, is growing old and has never conceived," Gabriel told him, "but soon she will bear a son. He will live ascetically, and be an evangelist among the Israelites, a prophet of God's coming."

In the sixth month of Elizabeth's pregnancy, Gabriel went to Elizabeth's cousin, Mary, in Nazareth, who was at the time a virgin. He informed her that she, too, would become pregnant. "You, Mary," the angel announced solemnly, "shall give birth to the Son of God."

Thereafter, Mary visited Elizabeth's house and stayed with her about three months. During that time the women happily and frequently discussed the visits they had received from Gabriel.

At first, Joseph wasn't too pleased to find that his intended wife was pregnant. He decided to break the marriage contract. An angel came to him in a dream and told him that his young bride would soon bear the Son of Yahweh. So Joseph carried out his agreement, and accepted Mary as his wife, but he had no intercourse with her while Mary was carrying the Son of God in her body.

Soon, Elizabeth gave birth to a son. Her husband, Zacharias, the priest, named the boy "John" and prophesied that the child would become a prophet, a fulfillment of God's promise to Abraham of a messenger to prepare the way for the Lord.

Shortly thereafter, the Emperor Augustus in Rome decreed that

a census be taken throughout the Empire and that the subjects of the Empire go to their own family city for registration. Although the time had come, by the nature of things, that the Son of God was to be born of Mary, Joseph, pursuant to the commands of the Emperor, brought his wife to Bethlehem for registration.

There Jesus was born in a manger. His birth was attended by astrologers from the East, who reported the rising of a Star in the heavens. Shepherds were summoned by an angel and a heavenly host sang praises.

Jerusalem was astir. King Herod, who had heard the rumors from the astrologers, had instructed them to report the infant's whereabouts, if they found him, to him. But after the stargazers had made their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh, at the place where the Star had led them, they did not return to Herod. An angel warned Joseph in a dream that the King's intentions towards the child were evil. Joseph arose and, with wife and child, fled to Egypt. (Luke relates that the family traveled directly from Jerusalem to Nazareth.)

But prior to his flight to Egypt, the infant Jesus was circumcised in accord with the Jews' contract with Jehovah. The mother, Mary, was also purified in accord with Jewish custom. They gave doves or pigeons as sacrificial offerings at the Temple in Jerusalem. There, an old man, Simeon, and a prophetess, Anna, made predictions of deliverance concerning the child.

When Herod realized that the astrologers were not going to return, he directed that the children under two years of age residing in Bethlehem be butchered.

Matthew and Luke report that Joseph and his family returned from Egypt (after Herod's death) to Nazareth. There Jesus was reared.

Luke 2: In Galilee, the child Jesus became healthy and wise. When he was twelve, His parents journeyed to Jerusalem to participate in the Passover Festival and took Him along. He became separated from His parents there and was lost for three days. When they found Him, He was in the Temple discussing the Jewish laws with the learned Temple teachers. He advised His parents that they should have been able to find Him at once, that He was bound to be in His Father's house. They returned home. And the boy continued to grow into manhood, wise and strong and admired by His fellows.

Matthew 3 and Mark 1: During the reign of the Roman Emperor Tiberius, and the rule of Pontius Pilate as Judean Governor, John, the son of Zacharias, made camp on the banks of the Jordon River. He called upon the people to repent and baptized those who heeded him. He preached: "Repent and be baptized or suffer the punishment of the coming judgment."

John was a man of the wilderness, dressed in a crude coat of

camel's hair gathered against his body with belt of animal hide, and subsisted on a diet of locusts and wild honey. He denied that he was a Messiah. He predicted that One would come who was greater than he, One who would baptize with fire and the Holy Spirit.

When Jesus was about thirty years old, He sought out His cousin, John, at the Jordan, who at that time was engaged in baptizing the people from the surrounding countryside. John asserted that it was he who should be baptized by Jesus rather than the other way around, but, nevertheless, performed the rite. When Jesus emerged from beneath the waters, the Spirit of God in the form of a dove descended upon Him. Those present heard the voice of the Heavenly Father announce that Jesus was His Son.

After the baptism, Jesus slipped away into the wilderness where He remained for forty days. There, He was tempted by the Devil, who promised Him food to satisfy His hunger, and the world in exchange for allegiance to Satan. Jesus rejected the temptations and refused the Devil's dare to throw Himself off the cliff in order to prove that He was the Son of God.

Meanwhile, John had aroused the wrath of Prince Herod when he criticized Herod for his affair with one of his women. John was arrested by Herod's men and imprisoned. When Jesus returned from His forty days hermitage and learned that John had been arrested, He left at once for Galilee, settling at Capernaum.

He took up John's message. He called upon the Galileans to repent. He warned them that the day of judgment was near. He taught in the synagogues around the lakeshore, finally returning to His home town, Nazareth.

In the synagogue there, He proclaimed Himself as a messenger for God in fulfillment of the prophecy of Isaiah. His neighbors and friends who had known Him for many years asked Him to perform the same miracles which He had been reputed to have performed in Capernaum. He declined to do so; angrily His friends and neighbors, with blows and threats, chased Him from the city. He returned to Capernaum.

In Capernaum, in the synagogue, Jesus performed His first act of exorcism. There was a man there possessed by the devil, and Jesus, in an authoritative manner, ordered the demon (devil) to come forth. The devil threw the man down, but came out. The report of this event spread rapidly through the entire countryside.

By the Sea of Galilee, Jesus summoned the brothers, Simon (Peter) and Andrew, and the brothers, James and John, sons of Zebedee, all fishermen, as His followers. At the home of Simon, Jesus, by touching the hand of Simon's mother-in-law, cured her of a fever. He began to cure the afflicted in the community of every kind of illness, including leprosy and epilepsy.

He exorcised frequently, ejecting devils from the many peoples

possessed. His wise teachings, acts of healing, and the exercise of the powers of exorcism upon the many devils who occupied the bodies of the people brought to Him a reputation which extended into Syria and Galilee and the ten towns from Judah to Trans-Jordan.

Mark 2: Once He cured a man of leprosy and warned the man to keep the event secret. Of course, the man immediately sought out his friends, neighbors and townspeople to tell them of his miraculous cure. Another time, when He was surrounded by a crowd, He cured a paralytic who had been lowered from the roof to Him. He spoke with authority. Some of the lawyers argued that He spoke with so much authority that it constituted a blasphemy of God.

He associated with tax gatherers and sinners and defended His action with the argument that it was the sinners, not the righteous, who needed Him. They criticized Him and His disciples (by this time He had added Levi to the fold) for failing to fast, and for picking grain from the fields for Sabbath dining upon the Sabbath. He effected cures upon the Sabbath Day, once curing a man with a withered hand in the synagogue in violation of Sabbatical code. The synagogue teachers and priests rebuked Him for His effrontery in disregarding priestly custom and tradition and began to plot against Him.

He skipped about, from city to city, not staying anywhere very long. He said that He was sent to proclaim the gospel throughout Judaea.

One night, Jesus went into the countryside for meditation and prayer. The next morning, He chose twelve disciples from among His followers: Simon (Peter), Andrew, James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James, Simon (the Zealot), Judas (brother of James), and Judas Iscariot (the traitor). He called these twelve His apostles.

Once, His mother and brothers came to see Him while He was in the midst of an admiring crowd. When told that His relatives were outside, he declined to go. "My mother and brother are those who sit with Me," He said, adding, "and those who obey God."

Matthew 5, Luke 6: Once, as He sat on the side of a hill, a crowd came to Him. He spoke to them thusly:

"Blessed are those who are in need, hungry, in tears, scorned by men, or poor, for in the judgment day their needs will be filled and their tears turned to laughter and joy; but woe unto those who now are rich and happy and content, for in the judgment day they shall hunger, mourn, and cry.

"You, My followers, are the light of the world, and you are expected to be an example to your fellow men so that they might see and praise your Father. Love your enemies. As you would that men should do to you, do you also unto them. Do not criticize or

judge others. Speak in parables. Look not for your brother's error, blind to your own faults.

"I have not come to abolish the Jewish law or the Jewish custom; I came instead to fulfill. As long as the earth exists, every syllable of the law shall remain in effect. Keep the law. He who does not do so will not enter Heaven; or, if he is admitted, he will be held there in low esteem. Settle your lawsuits. Curb your resentments. Show kindness to your brother.

"He who lusts for a woman may as well have committed adultery with her for his sin is much the same. If your eye cause you to sin, tear it from your head. If your hands should steal, sever them; it is better to lose a part of your body than for your entire soul to suffer the judgment fire.

"To marry a divorced woman is to commit adultery. To divorce one's wife for any reason other than infidelity causes her to be subject to adultery.

"Keep your word. Take no oath. Be passive. Offer no resistance to assaults. If one takes your coat, give him your cloak, too. Walk the extra mile with anyone who asks. Give charitably. Lend money graciously.

"Give in secret and not for recognition. Pray in secret, not in hypocritical repetition like the heathen, but like this: Our Father in Heaven, Thy name be hallowed, Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth as it is in Heaven; give us today our daily bread, forgive us our trespasses as we have forgiven those who have trespassed against us, and do not tempt us, but save us from the evil one. For Thine is the kingdom, power and glory forever. Amen.

"Fast secretly and with smiling face. Do not accumulate wealth on earth. Decide whether you will serve God or money. If you serve God, you do not need to worry about food and drink. God will keep you as He keeps the birds of the air and the plants of the field. No need to worry about tomorrow.

"Make no judgment upon others. The blind cannot lead the blind. The pupil is not superior to his teacher. From good comes good, and from evil comes evil. Don't cast your pearls before swine. Beware of false prophets.

"Just because someone calls me 'Lord' does not mean that he will enter the Kingdom of Heaven. He must also follow the will of God. Some will say, 'Lord, I performed exorcisms casting out devils in Your name'. I will look at them and say, 'I know thee not'.

"He who heeds My words is like unto the man who builds his house upon a rock and he who heeds not is that foolish one who would build his house upon the sand."

Mark 4: Some of His sermons were parables. There was the story He told of the man who sowed his fields with seed, some falling onto barren paths as food for the fowls of the air, some

upon stony ground, some among the thorns, and some upon good soil. "The sowed seed was the Word, and sometimes the Word falls upon some people who are heedless, like seed upon barren soil. Satan takes the Word away before it bears fruit. The Word for some is like a plant in rocky soil which cannot get root and dies quickly from the scorching sun or from adversities of the time. The Word, received by others, like the seed which falls among the thistles, is surrounded by worldly pleasures and temptations which soon extinguish its fruition. But the seed sown in good soil, that is, the Word received by those conditioned to receive it, will bear fruit a hundred fold."

Jesus taught that the Kingdom of God was like the growth of the mustard seed, the smallest of the seed sown, which, once taking root, grows taller and larger than other plants.

Matthew 8, and Luke: As Jesus left the hill where He had given the Sermon on the Mount, He was met by a leper who asked to be cured. Jesus touched him and he was well. Jesus advised him that he should exhibit his cured condition to the priests and make the offerings prescribed by Moses for his certification of cure.

Coming into Capernaum, Jesus was informed by a messenger that a slave of one of the Roman captains was ill. Jesus cured the slave without going to his bedside. At Peter's house, where they stayed, Jesus cured Peter's mother-in-law of fever by simply touching her hand. That night, He spent His time exorcising the evil spirits from those in town who were possessed by devils.

Luke 7: In Nain, Jesus stopped mourning marchers who were on the way to the cemetery with the body of the decedent. He restored the young man to life.

At this time, John had not been in prison. He sent two of his disciples to inquire as to whether Jesus was the expected One. Jesus only answered, "Describe to John how you have seen the blind see, the lame walk, the healing of lepers, and the raising of the dead to life."

To the crowds gathered to hear Him speak, Jesus praised John as one who was a messenger of God. He defended him against those who said that John was a man possessed of devils.

A Pharisee invited Jesus to dine with him. In the Pharisee's home was a woman of ill repute. She attended Jesus, washing His feet in tears, massaging them with soothing ointment, and wiping them with her hair. (The Pharisee began to suspect that Jesus was not a true prophet since He did not seem to recognize the immoral nature of the woman.) Suddenly, Jesus spoke to her: "Your sins are forgiven." The Pharisee then wondered by what authority Jesus was thus able to speak.

Jesus continued His tour of the villages accompanied by His twelve disciples and several women. Some of these women helped finance the group from their inheritances. Some of them were

women who had been possessed by demons and had been freed from demonic control by the exorcism of Jesus. Others had been healed by Him. Still others followed Him or the disciples as friends to the men or as friends to the cause. Among these women were Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Susanna. Jesus had chased seven devils from the body of Mary Magdalene.

To avoid the crowds which continued to accumulate, Jesus and His followers boarded a ship to cross the lake. Midway, a strong wind and storm came upon them with resulting high waves which broke over the sides of the ship. Jesus looked across the raging sea and rebuked the wind and ordered the seas to be calm. The wind stopped. The sea was smooth. They continued their journey.

Matthew, Mark 5, and Luke: The boat docked in Gadarenes, opposite Galilee. Jesus met a man who was possessed by so many devils he was named "Legion" (or the devils were Legion). (Matthew says there were two men.) He talked to the devils within the man. The devils begged Him not to banish them to the Abyss.

So Jesus granted the request of the devils, exorcising them, instead, from the man into a herd of pigs, which immediately rushed over a precipice into a lake and perished. Some bystanders were amazed. They carried the news of these events into the city ahead of Jesus and His entourage, alarming the townspeople. A delegation met Him at the city limits and told him to leave, so Jesus and His aides boarded their ship and returned to the other side.

Mark: There, He and His group were met by the local Rabbi, Jairus, and surrounded by a large crowd. As He walked through the streets of that city, a woman afflicted with persistent and continuous hemorrhaging touched His cloak. He stopped, sought her out, and when she had appeared before Him, announced that her faith had healed her.

He continued onward, accompanied by Rabbi Jairus, and, arriving at the Rabbi's home, was greeted with the news that Jairus' daughter, who had been ill, was now dead. Many friends and neighbors had gathered in mourning. Jesus entered the home and raised her from the dead. Her parents were astonished. Jesus instructed them not to tell anyone about the incident.

Jesus continued His rounds of the towns and villages in and around Galilee, curing all kinds of diseases. Once, He cured two blind men upon their assertion that they believed; another time, He cured a man who was dumb. The man was also possessed by a devil and Jesus cast out the devil. Jesus admonished His patients not to tell others of their cure. They told others.

Luke 9, Matthew 10, Mark 6: Jesus assembled His twelve disciples, gave them the ability to cure diseases and the power to cast out devils, and instructed them to travel throughout the land calling upon the people to repent of their sins. He explained that

they would live off of the charity of others. He admonished them to turn their back upon those who would not listen or aid them. "Turning your back on them will serve as a warning to them," He advised.

Matthew: Jesus told the Twelve, Simon (Peter), Andrew (Peter's brother), James (son of Zebedee), John (brother of James), Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew (the tax gatherer), James (son of Alphaeus), Lebbaeus (Thaddaeus), Simon (a zealot), and Judas Iscariot:

"Avoid the Gentiles. Leave the Samaritan towns alone. Carry the message to the lost sheep of Israel. Tell them that the Kingdom of Heaven (the day of judgment) is at hand. Heal the sick. Cast out devils which torment them. Carry neither money nor goods for barter. The people in the villages will listen to you and give you sustenance.

"If you should come upon a town which refuses to help you, do not remain. I can assure you of this, that on the day of the judgment, the village which refuses you will suffer the fierce wrath of God.

"Be careful. You will be arrested, imprisoned and whipped. Brother will betray brother; a child will betray his parent, and though there be chaos and confusion and you are persecuted wherever you go, be sustained in the knowledge that before all the villages of Israel have been visited, the Son of Man will come. And as the Father knows and cares for the smallest sparrow of the earth, as to when it is born and when it dies, so He will watch after you.

"And if you should claim Me on earth, I will report it to the Father, and if you deny Me, that, too, shall be reported. For I have not come to bring peace upon earth, but war, to set men against each other, even son against father, relative against relative. A man must place Me before his father or his mother or his child. He who receives you receives Me and the One who sent Me."

Matthew 11: Once Jesus and His disciples, walking through a cornfield on the Sabbath, plucked some of the ears of corn and ate it. On another occasion, Jesus, attending services in the synagogue on the Sabbath, healed a man with a withered hand. In answer to the criticism of the Pharisees that these activities on the Sabbath were prohibited by the Law, Jesus pointed out that King David, the priests and He were exempt from those ordinances. "Both David and the priests violated these ordinances in the Temple itself without punishment," He said, "and, therefore, so also can I."

He was accused of being a disciple of Beelzebub, the devil, and thus able to cast out devils, to which accusation He replied: "Obviously a devil cannot cast out a devil for such a division of power would represent a divided kingdom which would most

certainly fall." He said that He was able to perform the acts of exorcism through the Spirit of God.

"All sin," He taught, "of whatsoever nature, is forgivable — except one sin. Even those who speak against Me can be forgiven, but he who speaks against the Holy Ghost will never be forgiven. From good comes good, and from evil comes evil."

The Pharisees persisted in examining Him. "Come," they teased, "show us a sign that the day of judgment is at hand."

And Jesus replied: "Your request for a sign from Jehovah is indicative of your wickedness. You shall receive no further sign. As Jonah lay in the fish's belly for three days and nights, so also will the Son of Man remain buried in the earth. Upon the day of judgment, there will be little chance for you who did not listen.

"Even the people of Nineveh listened when Jonah called for their repentance. Even the Queen of the South (Sheba) made a long journey to hear the wisdom of Solomon. You are like unto the man possessed by a devil. When the devil leaves the man and is thereafter unable to find another home, it returns to the home it left, and if it finds that its home is still empty, it will, with seven more devils, re-enter the man."

While Jesus was talking, He was notified that His mother and brother were outside and wished to speak with Him. He refused to go to them, declaring that all those about Him who obeyed the will of Yahweh was His brother, sister, or mother.

Matthew 13: Jesus spoke in parables. He likened the Kingdom of Heaven to the man who had sown good seed in his field, but later learned that his enemy had added weed seed while he slept. The farmer allowed both crop and weed to grow until harvest, at which time the weeds were burned. Jesus explained the parable thusly:

"The sower was the Son of Man. The field represents the world, the good seed good people, the weeds bad people sowed by the devil. At harvest time, the weeds were gathered and burned. So, also, will the Son of Man send angels who will select the evil people and throw them into a blazing furnace to suffer pain and agony. The righteous will smile and shine.

"Like the separation of fish from a net," explained Jesus, "the angels will separate the wicked from the just and throw the wicked into a blazing furnace."

Jesus went to His home town and attempted to preach in that city in their synagogues. They refused His teachings — He could perform few miracles there.

Matthew, Luke and Mark: The peoples in the various communities continued to talk about Jesus. Some of them said that He was John the Baptist, raised to life; others said that He was a prophet; still others declared Him to be Elijah. King Herod stated that Jesus was John, raised from the dead.

(Herod had taken as his wife Herodias, the former wife of his brother, Philip. John had found disfavor with Herodias when he appeared before Herod and declared to him that he [Herod] had no lawful right to his brother's wife. So, during one evening of gaiety when Herod was particularly susceptible to the wiles of Herodias, he acceded to her request that John be beheaded.)

When Jesus and His disciples learned of John's death, they withdrew quietly to Bethsaida, in seclusion. The people discovered their presence and called upon Jesus — He came out, attended them, spoke to them, and healed those who were sick.

There were about 5,000 men who remained there with Him until nightfall. His disciples reported to Him that there was no food to feed them except for five loaves of bread and two small fishes. Jesus, through His disciples, distributed the fish and the bread to all the people, until they had eaten their fill. There were twelve large baskets of leftovers.

Matthew, Mark: Jesus then told His disciples to sail across the lake while he finished His ministrations to the people. A short time afterward, His disciples found themselves struggling with oars and rudder as they battled a strong headwind. Suddenly, they saw Jesus walking across the rough waters toward their boat. He would have passed them by, but they cried out to Him.

Matthew: Peter requested the Lord to command him over the water to meet Him. The Lord so commanded. But as Peter walked over the turbulent waves, he became afraid, and when he became afraid, he began to sink. Jesus caught him, pulled him up and reproached him for his lack of faith. Then they climbed into the boat together.

Matthew, Mark: And when Jesus entered the boat, the waves became still and the wind calm, and their crossing to Gennesaret smooth. Those who occupied the boat were awed. "Truly," they whispered, "Jesus is the Son of God."

The group went ashore and some of the local people saw Jesus. The news soon spread throughout the community that He had come. Many sick people were brought to him; those who got near enough to touch the hem of His garment were thereby immediately cured.

The Pharisees, observing Jesus and His disciples, criticized Him for eating without washing His hands. Jesus answered their criticism of Him with criticism of them, thusly, "You are hypocritical. You have not honored your father or mother when you set apart for God's use those things which should have been used for the benefit of your father and mother.

"A man is not defiled by what goes into his mouth, but by what comes out of it."

Mark 7: Then Jesus and His entourage traveled into Tyre and Sidon. While He tarried in the home of friends, a Canaanite

woman, a Gentile (Mark says a Greek, a Phoenician of Syria), came to Him seeking exorcism of a devil from the body of her daughter. Jesus did not answer her, and she begged Him, pleading that He free her daughter from the demon's possession.

Still Jesus refused, though the woman lay prone, crying for help. His disciples urged Him to send her away, as she was only a Gentile. Again Jesus refused her, saying:

"I was sent to help the lost sheep of the house of Israel, not to give aid and comfort to the Gentile."

But the woman persisted, moaning and crying at the feet of Jesus, beseeching Him that He should relieve her daughter's body of its torment.

He said to her: "It is not proper that I should take the children's bread (that which belonged to the Jew) and throw it to the dogs (the Gentiles)."

"Even the dogs under the table receive the children's scraps," she answered.

Jesus was moved, and He relented. He told the woman that the demon was gone. Sure enough, when the woman returned home, she found her child in bed. The spirit had left.

Jesus' route of return to the Sea of Galilee was through the midst of the coasts of the ten cities, and everywhere He went, people came to Him who were ill. They brought to Him a man who not only was deaf, but also had a speech impediment. Jesus cured him by simply putting His fingers into the man's ears, spitting and touching the man's tongue.

Jesus always bade the beneficiaries of His healing and the witnesses thereto to remain quiet, but the astonished witnesses would quickly go out and spread the news of His miracles. He cured the lame, blind, sick, and dumb.

Mark 8: When the crowds gathered, and there was little food, He fed the multitude with a few loaves of bread and a few small fish. He fed 4,000 with seven loaves of bread and a few fishes, and when everyone had eaten their fill, there remained seven full baskets of meat.

Then He and His disciples boated to Magdala, where He was again confronted by the Pharisees. They asked Him for a sign from Heaven. Again, He told them that this generation of Jews would receive no sign, except the sign of the prophet, Jonah.

Matthew 16: Once again, while on the way to Caesarea Philippi, Jesus reproached His disciples for their expressed fears of having an inadequate supply of food, and reminded them of the thousands who had been fed from just a little. When they settled themselves in Caesarea, Jesus asked His disciples what they had heard concerning the people's talk as to the identity of the Son of Man. His disciples told Him that some of the people claimed that John the Baptist was the Son of Man; others claimed that Elijah

was He; and still others claimed that Jeremiah or one of the other prophets was the Son of Man.

"Who," Jesus asked, "am I?"

Peter looked at Jesus and replied, "You are the Christ, the Son of the Living God."

Jesus praised him (according to Matthew), and told him: "You are Peter and upon this rock I will build my church. I give to you the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven, and whatsoever upon earth you declare to be the rule of heaven, so Heaven will be bound. Except through you, none will be admitted."

Jesus told His disciples not to tell anybody that He was the Messiah.

(According to Mark) Peter rebuked Jesus for His claim of future suffering for mankind, and Jesus said to him, "Your rebuff belongs to Satan, not Jehovah."

Continuing with Luke, Mark 9, and Matthew:

From that time, Jesus began to predict to His disciples that He would endure suffering and hardship in Jerusalem, and He told them: "Those who follow Me must forget concern for their own sake, for those who lose their life because of Me shall save it."

He predicted that some of the disciples would still be living at the time God's kingdom came into being.

Six days later, Jesus, Peter, John and James secluded themselves in the hills to pray. As Jesus prayed, He was transformed — His clothes became brilliantly white. Suddenly, Moses and Elijah were there with Him, discussing the events which were to occur on His Jerusalem journey. Then a Cloud appeared, and from the Cloud, came a voice: "This is My Beloved Son."

On their way down the mountain, Jesus instructed His disciples not to disclose the events which they had seen and heard until after His death.

Matthew: When they rejoined their group, they learned that the disciples who had remained there had unsuccessfully attempted to cast a devil from a boy, a spirit which caused the boy to scream, go into convulsions, foam on the mouth, and throw himself into the fire or water. Jesus scolded them for their lack of faith, took the boy's hand and exorcised the devil. Immediately the boy was well. Jesus said, "If you have faith no bigger than a mustard seed, you can move mountains."

As they continued through Galilee, Jesus predicted to His disciples that the "Son of Man" would be killed by men and would rise after three days. In Capernaum, again, He told His disciples (who had been talking among themselves as to who was the greatest) that he who wished to be first must make himself a servant of all.

"And he who is not against us," He said, speaking of those who

were casting out devils in His name, "is on our side." He encouraged His followers to obey, saying: "A man should have the faith of a child."

Matthew, Mark: Jesus taught: "Settle your disputes with your brother, either directly with him or before the elders, or at least before the congregation; and if he will not listen even there, then you may treat him as a Gentile, or tax collector. What you permit or refuse on earth shall be permitted or refused in Heaven. Forgive your brother seventy times seven."

(Matthew reports that Jesus, while in Capernaum, instructed His disciples to pay the Temple tax with a coin which they would find in the mouth of the first fish they caught in the lake.)

Luke: As Jesus traveled over the Samaritan hills toward His destiny in Jerusalem, some of the villages refused Him food and lodging. He did not turn the wrath of God upon them at once, as His disciples requested. Later, in preparation for sending seventy-two of His followers to various cities to announce His coming, He promised that the people of the villages which had not aided Him, including Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum, were condemned to the torments of the fires of hell.

It was not long before the seventy-two returned, happily excited. "In Your name," they told Jesus, "we can even master the devils."

Jesus prayed, giving thanks unto Jehovah.

One time, a lawyer asked: "What can I do to inherit eternal life?" Jesus, in reply, asked the lawyer the law. The lawyer answered, "Love God with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind, and love your neighbor as yourself." Jesus affirmed, "Do this and you shall live."

But the lawyer insisted upon a definition for "neighbor". Jesus answered with a parable: "A traveler was ambushed, robbed and left by the side of the road to die. A priest passed by him. A little while later, a Levite walked past, although he, too, could see the plight of the man. But then, a Samaritan stopped at his side, rendered aid, tended his wounds, and saw to it that he had food, lodging and money to assist him in his recovery. Who," said Jesus, "was his friend?"

Soon thereafter Jesus was invited to rest in Martha's home. When He had settled Himself, Martha's sister, Mary, sat at His feet, listening to Him. It was not long before Martha, irked by her sister's failure to assist her with the many chores necessitated by the presence of the guests, protested to Jesus that He should send Mary to help. "Don't worry so much, Martha," Jesus told her. "Each of us have a job to do. Mary is doing just fine where she is."

Jesus instructed His disciples to ask of God as a child would prevail upon his father, for he that asks, receives.

Another time, Jesus drove a devil out of a man who was dumb, and when the demon fled, the dumb man could speak. Jesus was

accused of being in a conspiracy with the devil; His ability to exorcise demons, contended His accusers, was proof. Jesus responded that a divided kingdom cannot stand (a devil could not drive out a devil). "Besides," He argued, "there are many others in the community who are casting out devils, acting through the power of God, rather than Belzebub, the same as I am."

The crowds asked Jesus for a sign; Jesus said the people were sinful for making such a request and that the only sign they would receive was the sign of Jonah.

A Pharisee invited Jesus to dine with him. Jesus did not wash before sitting at the table and the Pharisee protested. Jesus reproached him, "Alas for you. You pay tithes, attend your synagogues, follow your ceremonies, build tombs and do public works honoring God, but you do not love Him. Your heart is unclean."

The lawyers and the Pharisees were angered by His evasions and criticism and began to follow Him and ask Him questions in front of His audiences, hoping to trap Him. To the crowd, Jesus spoke against the Pharisees and the lawyers, preaching that the people be wary of them and their hypocrisy.

"Have no fear," He told the people, "even the hairs of your head are numbered. As God provides for the sparrows of the field, He will provide for you. He who acknowledges Me before men will be acknowledged by the Son of Man before the angels of God; he who blasphemes the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven."

Luke 12: He told His people not to worry about food, drink, or being arrested. "Jehovah will care for you," He said. "The birds of the air do no work. He provides for them. See how beautifully He adorns the lillies of the field. Yet they do not toil.

"Give away all of your possessions and prepare," He urged, "for the coming of the Kingdom of God, for it will come at the time you least expect it." Jesus continued: "I have come to send fire upon earth. I am to be tempted, tested, and tortured. I came not to bring peace, but to bring division upon earth and to turn the members of the family against each other.

"Settle your differences with your brother, lest you end up in Court before the Judge. Repent of your sins and save yourselves from the catastrophes which constantly occur. Remember the eighteen people who were killed only recently when the tower of Siloam collapsed upon them?"

Once, when Jesus was teaching in the synagogue on the Sabbath, He healed a woman who had been crippled for eighteen years. The woman, whose disability had disfigured her body, straightened and stood up before the members of the congregation; they began to murmur and praise God. But not the priest. He rebuked Jesus, and he told the congregation that there were six working days upon which they could be cured, but that the Healer

was not to work upon them on the Sabbath.

"Hypocrite," said Jesus, "do you not feed or water your oxen on the Sabbath? Is it any less wrong to free this woman from Satan's bonds on that holy day?"

Jesus likened the Kingdom of God to the yeast which the cook mixed with a quantity of flour until it was risen.

He taught that only a few would be saved, that not all who called upon Him would gain entry into Paradise. He continued His work from place to place, though He received rumors that Herod was going to kill Him. He healed a man on the Sabbath and reminded the critical Pharisees that they would not hesitate to pull one of their work animals from a pit even though it be a Sabbath day. He advised His followers to be humble, gracious, charitable, and to invite the poor, the blind, and the lame in their homes, and He said:

"He who comes to Me and does not hate his father, his mother, his wife, or his children, even his brothers and sisters, and his own life, cannot follow Me. Also, you must give up all your wordly goods if you wish to be a follower of mine.

"Remember that I have told you."

Luke 15: In answer to the complaint of the Pharisees that He consorted with tax collectors and persons of ill repute, Jesus answered: "If a shepherd lose a sheep from his flock, does he not leave the ninety-nine which are safe and seek out the one which is lost? If a woman loses one of her ten pieces of silver, does she not spend her time looking for the piece that is missing? Does not a father welcome home a prodigal son with new robe, ring, feasting, and celebration, though he has made no celebration for the son who remained and was constantly with him?"

"And you," He said to His disciples, "must prove yourselves trustworthy by being faithful in small matters, so that bigger responsibilities may be given you. You cannot serve God and money, for no man can serve two masters.

"The law (which Moses gave) shall never end. Not one syllable — not one mark — shall be changed or lose its effect.

"One who divorces his spouse and marries another commits adultery. He who marries a divorced woman commits adultery. It is better for a man not to marry, but if he must, he shall not lightly put away his wife."

Lazarus was a poor man who hobbled about moaning from the pain of the sores and wounds upon his body. He died about the time a neighboring rich man, who had always lived in comfort and luxury, passed away. From Hell, the rich man could see Lazarus with Abraham and he called out to them for relief. Abraham would not allow Lazarus to offer any assistance. "Then send Lazarus to my home to warn my family about the terrors of Hell," plead the tormented man. Abraham refused.

"For," Abraham said, "if your relatives do not listen to Moses and the prophets, they would not even pay any attention to someone risen from the dead."

As Jesus was traveling toward Jerusalem, He was approached by ten lepers who begged Him to restore them. He healed them. One of them fell on his face at Jesus' feet, praising Him. Jesus remarked, "Could only the foreigner (the Samaritan) give thanks for the cleansing which he received!"

Jesus refused to predict the day the world would end, but instead, prophesied: "As things were in Noah's days or the last days of Lot, so will it be in the days of the Son of Man." Jesus taught that in the last days he who had exalted himself would be humbled, and the humble would be exalted. He emphasized that one should have the faith of a child if he wished to enter the Kingdom of God.

He advised a rich man who had kept the law: "Sell all that you have, distribute the proceeds to the poor, and follow Me." But the rich man would not. Jesus remarked that it was easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the Kingdom of God.

Jesus told His twelve disciples: "We are about to go into Jerusalem. There the Son of Man will be delivered to the Gentiles. He will be scorned, mocked, whipped, and killed; and, on the third day, He will rise again."

Near Jericho, a blind man called out to Jesus excitedly as he was passing by and Jesus cured him. In Jericho, Jesus and His group stayed with Zacchaeus, a rich tax collector, to the disapproval of several of the citizens. Jesus told them that Zacchaeus, too, was a son of Abraham and that the Son of Man had come to seek and save what is lost.

Luke, Matthew, Mark 11: On the road leading into Jerusalem (Bethphage), Jesus instructed two of His disciples to go into a nearby village and bring back a colt which they would find tied to a post on the street. They did so. As Jesus rode the ass toward the city, great crowds gathered along the road. The people spread their garments in the path of the ass, and others ran along behind singing "Hosannah! Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord."

Seeing Jerusalem, Jesus wept. Through His tears, He predicted that its walls would be torn down and its townspeople killed or enslaved because they knew not when the Son of Man had come. Arriving in town, Jesus entered the Temple and drove the traders out.

Matthew, Mark: Jesus spent the night in Bethany. The next morning, as He was traveling toward Jerusalem, He became hungry and approached a fig tree for food. There was no fruit on the tree at the time. Irked, Jesus placed a curse upon the tree and it

immediately withered and died. Jesus told His surprised disciples: "If one has faith, without doubt, one can cast mountains into the sea."

Matthew, Luke, Mark: The chief priest, lawyers and leading citizens of the community were displeased by Jesus' reprimands and demonstrations. They questioned Jesus, expecting that His bond with the people would be damaged by His answers. Jesus responded directly, question to question, and by parables. He refused to tell the priests His source of authority since they would not say whether John the Baptist was from God or from men. He argued that Roman taxes could be paid (Caesar's coins belong to Caesar).

He debated the Sadducees, who did not believe in resurrection: "Proof that the dead live again lives in the scripture," He argued, "wherein Moses, writing of Abraham and the burning bush, stated that God is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Therefore, since God is not God of the dead, but of the living, they were all living, to Him."

He told this parable to those who teased Him: "A man planted a vineyard and leased it to certain husbandmen. When he sent other servants to check upon the tenant and the progress of the vineyard, they were killed. He sent his own son to these vineyards and the tenants killed him also. So, of course, the owner took vengeance upon the tenants and put the vineyard in someone else's care." It was clear to the Pharisees and the priests that Jesus was talking about them. Their suspicions and mistrust of Jesus were intensified and their resolutions to cause Him harm were refueled.

Jesus told the people: "Beware of the priests. They are hypocrites who consume the property of widows."

Jesus asked the Pharisees: "How could the Christ be the son of David? Didn't David say, according to our scriptures, that Jehovah said to the Lord, 'Sit at my right hand'? If David calls him Lord, how can He be David's son?"

As Jesus observed the people making their donations to the church, He remarked that the poor widow who had donated only two small coins (all that she had) had given more than those who had donated much (but only a small portion of what they had). He predicted that the Temple would be destroyed. His disciples asked, "When?"

Mark 13: Jesus said, "Many will come pretending to be Me. Pay no attention. Do not panic at news of wars and riot. You will be persecuted first, then there will be wars, earthquakes, famines, and plagues, and the sky will be filled with horror. You will be imprisoned and brought before kings where you will testify. Brothers, fathers, and children will betray each other. The sun will be darkened. The stars will fall. And then —

"the Son of Man will come from among the clouds, radiant and glorious, accompanied by angels. As you have learned from watching the fig tree — when its buds appear you know that summer is near — you will also know that the end is near when you see these things of which I have told you. All this will pass within your lifetime, but only the Father knows the day and hour. Be prepared. The Son of Man will come at a time you would not guess. Watch for Him.

"The Son of Man, attended by His angels, will sit on His throne before all the nations. He will separate the righteous from the unrighteous and He will bid the righteous to enter and receive the kingdom; He will declare a curse upon those who failed and commit them to the everlasting fire attended by the Devil and his angels forever."

Mark 14: As Jesus rested in Bethany awaiting the time of the Passover Feast (the Festival of Unleavened Bread), in the home of Simon, the leper, one of the women came to him and anointed His head with a perfumed, expensive ointment. His disciples suggested that it would have been better for the woman to have sold the luxury and given the money to the poor, but Jesus rebuked them, saying: "I appreciate what the woman has done for me. The poor will always be here, but I will not."

While Jesus rested there, the disciple Judas Iscariot was in Jerusalem betraying his Master to the chief priests. They paid him thirty silver pieces and he promised that at his earliest opportunity he would turn Jesus over to them.

Then, on the evening of the first day of the Festival, as Jesus dined with His twelve disciples at the place which His aides had prepared in accord with His instructions, Jesus told them, "One of you has betrayed me," and (according to Matthew) Judas asked: "Is it me?" Jesus answered, "Yes."

During the meal, Jesus took bread and wine, parceled it out to the twelve and bid them eat and drink. "The bread is My body," He said, "and the wine is My blood, blood shed for many."

He told them that they would fail in their faith.

Peter denied it, and Jesus sighed: "Before the cock crows twice, you will three times claim that you know Me not."

Luke: Then, He told them that thereafter they would be considered criminals and should arm themselves.

Matthew, Mark and Luke: In the evening, Jesus visited Gethsemane (Mount of Olive), taking Peter and the sons of Zebedee, James and John, with Him. He commanded them to wait at a place. He went a little further, prostrated Himself upon the ground, and prayed:

"Father, if it is possible, do not let Me suffer that which is set out for Me."

Jesus would pray for a while. Then he would return to His three

disciples and find them sleeping. He would scold them and wake them and return to His vigil of prayer. Three times He returned to His disciples during the evening and three times He found them asleep.

During His prayers to the Father (that He be spared if it be God's will), an angel appeared and He prayed the more fervently. Great globs of sweat fell from Him as He lay there. Then Jesus arose, woke His faithful followers, and announced that He was about to be betrayed.

Even as He was speaking, His disciple, Judas, came toward them, leading a crowd of armed men. Judas kissed Jesus. At this prearranged signal, some of the armed peoples from the crowd pounced upon Jesus and held Him fast.

Matthew, Luke: A disciple severed the ear of one of the servants of the High Priest with his sword. But Jesus reminded His followers that they should not resist. He touched the wounded man's ear and healed him.

Then the disciples and followers of Jesus ran away. Jesus, arrested, was taken to the palace of the High Priest.

Matthew, Mark, Luke: While the chief priest, his elders, lawyers, and council argued the disposition to be made of Jesus, Peter slipped into the courtyard and mingled among the servants. The evidence was conflicting. Finally, the High Priest asked Jesus: "Are You the Messiah?" And Jesus answered, "I am."

"Blasphemy," shouted the High Priest, turning to the council, "His own tongue condemns Him. What say you?" And the council answered, "The penalty is death."

As the captors began to torment Jesus, taunting Him to "prophecy" or "save Himself by His Godly powers," spitting upon Him, striking Him, and kicking Him as He stood blindfolded, a servant girl in the courtyard was asking Peter whether he was a follower of Jesus. Peter denied it. Other bystanders accused him; again he denied any acquaintance. As Jesus' captors herded Him from the hall, someone said to Peter that he must be a follower since he, too, was obviously a Galilean. Peter cursed and denied any knowledge of Jesus. Then the cock crowed. And crowed again. And Peter burst into tears.

Mark 15: The next day, the servants of the chief priests bound Jesus and delivered Him to Pilate (the Roman Governor). Pilate asked Him, "Are You the King of the Jews?" "Those are your words," Jesus replied.

Pilate then referred the case to Herod. Herod, his soldiers, and the members of his court, contemptuously teased and taunted an unanswering Jesus, put a royal robe upon Him and returned Him to Pilate. Pilate then proposed to the High Priest, the Jewish elders, and the people that Jesus be released with a flogging. They shouted down his proposition.

Luke 23: It was a custom for the Governor to release one prisoner to the people during the holiday. Pilate gave them a choice between Jesus and Barabbas, a thief. The crowd chose Barabbas, and turned thumbs down on Jesus. "Crucify the blasphemer," they chanted.

Pilate ordered that Jesus be flogged and then crucified. In doing so, he said to the priests, elders, council, and people, "I wash my hand of the death of this man. His blood shall be upon you and upon your children." And with one voice they agreed.

Then Pilate's soldiers dragged Jesus into their prison offices, stripped Him of His clothes, dressed Him in a scarlet robe, handed him a reed as His scepter, and placed a crown of thorns upon His head. They spit upon Him, jeered and scoffed Him as King of the Jews, and mocked Him and asked Him to save Himself. They took the reed from His hand and beat Him about the head with it. They kicked and abused Him, and when they had tired of this, they removed the scarlet cloak, redressed Him in His own clothing, and led Him forth to be crucified. A passerby, Simon from Cyrene, was hailed and compelled to carry the cross of Jesus.

Soon the whole procession — soldiers, Jesus, Simon carrying the cross, a jeering mob, and weeping and mourning women — arrived at Golgotha. Jesus (according to Luke) spoke out to the women that they should not cry for Him, but for themselves and their children for the day would come when man would say he wished he had not been born.

Two thieves were being crucified at the same time. The soldiers erected Jesus' cross between them. As they hung Jesus upon the cross, He looked down at the crowd and prayed: "Father, forgive them for they know not what they do."

One of the criminals urged Him to prove that He was the Messiah by saving the three of them, but the other bandit pointed out that Jesus was innocent while they were guilty. Jesus promised him that on that very day they would see Paradise together.

The soldiers divided His clothing by casting lots, brought Him sour wine, and put a sign above His head reading "King of the Jews". With the Jewish leaders and priests gathered around, they challenged Him that a Savior of all Israel, the Son of God, would surely be able to save himself.

At midday, the world became dark; there was no sunlight for more than three hours. (Luke) Jesus gave a loud cry saying, "Father, I commit My spirit to You." (According to Matthew, Jesus said: "My God, why have You forsaken Me?") A little later He gave another loud cry, His last, and at that instant (Matthew, Mark), the veil of the Temple was torn from top to bottom.

An earthquake followed (Matthew), graves opened and many people (now Saints) were resurrected and went into Jerusalem

where they were seen by many of their friends.

But at the site of the crucifixion, the Roman soldiers stood in awe. "Truly," they said, "this Man was the Son of God." (Luke) One of the centurions said: "Without question, this Man was good."

The proceedings were ended. The crowd melted away, leaving a lonely group of mourning women (women who had accompanied Him from Galilee). Among them were Mary of Magdala, Mary, the mother of James and Joseph, and Salome. It was Friday, the day before the Sabbath. Joseph of Arimathaea, a Pharisee and respected attorney, approached Pilate and asked for the body of Jesus. Pilate consented, and Joseph came, with servants, wrapped Jesus in a linen cloth, laid Him in a tomb cut out of stone. The women followed a little way behind him, watching and weeping.

(Matthew) The Chief Priest was still not satisfied. He, with some of the Pharisees, requested that Pilate place a guard at the gravesite (for Jesus had claimed that after three days He would rise again) to prevent some of Jesus' followers stealing the body and claiming that Jesus was raised from the dead. Pilate furnished the sentrys to watch the sealed sepulchre.

Mark 16: The following day was the Sabbath and the women (the two Marys and Salame) refrained from going to the gravesite in accord with Jewish custom. Early Sunday morning, however, they left together for the tomb, intending to anoint the body of Jesus with sweet spices and ointments.

When they reached the burial site, they saw that the stone blocking the entranceway to the tomb had been pushed aside; hesitantly, they entered. A young man wearing a white robe was sitting inside, and he said to them, "Do not be afraid. Jesus of Nazareth is not here. He has been resurrected. Tell Peter Jesus is going before you into Galilee. There you will see Him'."

The women ran away from the tomb terrified at what they had seen and afraid to tell anybody. (Luke recites that there were two men at the gravesite who gave this information to the women, and they went at once and told the eleven what they had seen.)

According to Matthew, as the women approached the hillside tomb, an angel dressed in glistening and radiant white descended from Heaven during the midst of a violent earthquake and rolled the stone away. While the guards, too terrified to move, stood mute, the angel announced to the women that Jesus had been resurrected. The women rushed off to tell the eleven disciples. On their way, they met Jesus, who told them to inform the disciples that they would see Him, Jesus, in Galilee.

(According to Luke, the apostles would not believe anything the women had said.) (Mark's account says Jesus first appeared, Sunday, to Mary of Magdala — from whom He had exorcised

seven devils — but when she delivered this news to His followers, they did not believe her. A short time thereafter, He appeared, but in a different form, to two of the followers as they were walking along the countryside. This event was reported by them to the group, none of whom would believe it.)

Meanwhile (according to Matthew), the guards hurried into the city and told the Chief Priest the morning's events. The Chief Priest took the matter up with the elders and it was finally decided that they should make a large bribe to the soldiers to get them to say that the body of Jesus was stolen by the disciples of Jesus while they, the guards, were asleep. The soldiers took the money and told the tale.

Matthew: Then, while the eleven were gathered together in Galilee (Luke says Jerusalem), Jesus appeared before them. He demonstrated to them that He was alive by eating a piece of fish while they watched. He said:

“Go into all the world, among all nations, with the good news so that all who believe and receive baptism will be saved. Teach them obedience in accordance with the commandments I have given you. I am with you always, even unto the end of the world.”

Mark: Then, Jesus ascended into Heaven where He sits at the right hand of God. And they went out into the nations with the news and ordinances, as they had been commanded.

JOHN

Comment

The gospel of John appeared early in the Second Century, A.D. Theophilus of Antioch, late in the Second Century, claimed that John, the disciple of Jesus, son of Zebedee, was the author. The Church Hierarchy of that day (Irenaeus, Polycarp and Clement) affirmed Theophilus' assertion.

John, the disciple, supposedly lived in Ephesus at the time of the writing. During that period a prominent churchman, John, the Elder, resided there. The gospel contents are so foreign to Jewish traditional style, content, and concept, so scholars claim, that John, the Jewish apostle, could not have authored it; John, the Elder, may have done so.

There were other gospel accounts, notably the gospel of Matthias, of Barnabus, the disciple Thomas, the apostle Peter, of James the Younger, of Bartholomaeus, and Andrew. These contributions were deleted from initial compilations of the Holy Scripture in the Fourth Century and, consequently, were finally discredited altogether, and gradually disappeared from use.

John, the disciple, was also named as the author of Revelations, a claim most difficult to sustain. Perhaps this may have been a reason for the absence of John from earliest Canon catalogues. Unlike Revelations, however, it was accepted at an early date (2nd or 3rd Century) and later declared "divine".

* * * * *

1: The Word was in the beginning, was with God and the Word was God.

John was a witness sent from God to testify to the "Light". John testifies: "He comes after me, but ranks before me, for before I was born, He was. From Him we have received grace after grace. The law came through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus Christ."

John the Baptist denied that he was the awaited Messiah, a prophet, or Elijah. He declared that he baptized in water, that One would follow him who was greater than all. The next day, in baptizing Jesus, he told the people that it was Jesus whom he had described as being the Son of God. He said that when he baptized Jesus, he witnessed the Holy Spirit coming from Heaven and abide upon Jesus.

As Jesus passed John the next day at the river, John remarked that Jesus was the Lamb of God. Immediately, two of John's disciples left him to follow Jesus, addressing Jesus as Rabbi (meaning teacher). Jesus, traveling through Galilee, also recruited Simon Peter, Philip and Nathanael.

He promised them: "Someday you will see the heavens open and

God's angels descend upon the Son of Man."

At Cana - in Galilee - Jesus and His mother were guests at a wedding. The party ran short of wine. Jesus commanded some of the servants to fill several jars with water. It was then served to the guests, who acknowledged that it was some of the best wine they had ever tasted.

Later, He went to Jerusalem with His mother, brothers and disciples. When He discovered traders and money changers in the temples, He improvised a whip and, with it, drove the opportune merchants from the sanctuary. They asked Him by what right He had to exercise such authority. Jesus replied that if the Temple were destroyed, He would raise it again in three days (really, what He was talking about was, figuratively — that is, the Temple was His body — later, after He had been raised from the dead, His disciples remembered what He had said at the Jerusalem temple).

3: Jesus told Nicodemus, an important official and a Pharisee, that unless a man has been born again, he could not get into Heaven. Nicodemus asked Him, "How can a man be born again?" Jesus explained: "No one can go to Heaven without being born from water and spirit. Flesh can give birth only to flesh; it is spirit that gives birth to spirit."

Nicodemus: "I do not understand what you mean."

"How could the learned man fail to understand!" exclaimed Jesus. "No one has gone into Heaven except He who came down from Heaven. As the Son of Man is lifted — like the serpent was lifted by Moses in the wilderness — so it is that they who believe in the Son of Man may possess eternal life.

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son that he who believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life.

"It is through God's Son that God intended salvation for man."

Thereafter, Jesus traveled throughout Judaea with His disciples, baptizing and calling upon the citizens to repent. At that time John, who had not yet been imprisoned, was baptizing and preaching at Aenon. Some of John's disciples became concerned that the activities of Jesus would reflect upon their leader, and they asked John about it.

John told them: "I am not the Messiah — I will find joy in His work and, as He becomes known to more and more people, my own position will be of less significance."

Jesus carried His work into Samaria and once, late in the evening, He found Himself by Jacob's well, tired and thirsty (this is near Sychar). Jesus asked a Samaritan woman for a drink of water from the well. The woman was shocked (Jews and Samaritans will not drink from the same containers), "Are you asking a Samaritan?"

Jesus answered, "If you knew who I was, it would be you who

would be asking Me for a drink, only you would want a drink of Living Water, water for an eternal life."

And the woman said, "Give some to me."

"Bring your husband," He said. But she had no husband. Jesus told her that it was clear the Samaritans attempted to worship without knowing what they worshipped, while the Jews failed though understanding what salvation was all about; that the time would come when the Jew would worship the Father in spirit and in truth. He told her that He was the Messiah.

When the disciples returned, the woman left, but soon brought back others to hear Jesus speak. Many of them became believers. Jesus stayed in the accommodations which the Samaritans provided Him and His followers for two days. The woman's friends told her that, indeed, there was no doubt but that Jesus was Savior of the World.

Then He journeyed into Galilee.

At Cana, an officer came to Jesus and asked Him for a cure of his son who was lying ill in Capernaum. It was done.

Still later, in Jerusalem, at one of the Jewish feasts, at a fountain which the Jews called Bethesda, around which lay many crippled and sick, Jesus spoke to a man that had been crippled for thirty-eight years. He had been lying by the water, but had no strength anymore, he said, to enter the water of the pool when it became agitated and, therefore, had not been cured (at the time, on various and divers occasions, an angel would enter the pool and stir the water and the first person who entered the waters of the pool following this turbulence received a miraculous cure of their affliction).

Jesus told the man: "Pick up your bed and walk." As the man was carrying the bed along, some of his fellow Jews called out to him, "It is against God's commandments for you to carry your bed on the Sabbath." The cripple told them of his cure.

However, the Jewish leaders were critical of Jesus' constant disregard of the Sabbath law. Jesus would defend Himself with the answer that "My Father has not quit working". This only strengthened their resolve to kill Him since He, in effect, was claiming equality with God. And to such argument, Jesus replied, "The Son can act only through the Father; all men should honor the Son as they would honor the Father."

"The Son of Man has also been given the right of judgment," Jesus explained. "John was My witness, but I can count on a witness greater than John. Do not imagine that I shall be your accuser. Your accuser is Moses. If you believed Moses, you would believe Me, for he wrote about me. If you do not believe him, how than can you believe Me?"

6: Once, on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, a large crowd gathered. There was no food, except for five small loaves of bread and two small fishes. Jesus bade the people to sit and, after they

had done so, divided the bread and fish into parcels. His followers delivered the portions to the people in the crowd. When the people had eaten their fill, the disciples collected twelve baskets of bread which remained. The people remarked that "surely, Jesus must be the promised Messiah". It appeared they would try to declare Him King, but Jesus, seeing this, slipped away into the mountains.

Jesus' disciples were anxious to reach Capernaum. They departed by boat and ran into a strong headwind and heavy sea; as they struggled with the oars, they saw Jesus walking on the water toward them. At first, they shook with fear, but He spoke to them calmly and came on board, and immediately they reached their destination.

Some of the crowd from across the lake followed Jesus across to Capernaum, and next morning they sought Him out. Jesus told them:

"You must forget the earthly food with which you were nourished yesterday. You must work for the food of eternal life. I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to Me shall not be hungry. I have come down from Heaven to do the will of Him who sent me. No man can come to the Father but by Me. He that believes in Me has everlasting life.

"Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and on the last day, I will raise him up from the dead. He who shall eat Me shall live because of Me."

Jesus spoke the same message when He was teaching in the Capernaum synagogue. The message was not readily accepted, and Jesus explained, "The spirit alone prolongs life. The flesh is of no moment. Some of you are without faith. No one can come to Me except by the will of the Father." Many of the people there were unable to understand the message. They withdrew from His teaching and refused to associate with Him or have anything to do with Him. The twelve, however, remained faithful.

Jesus remained hidden from the Jewry in Galilee. His brothers attempted to persuade Him to accompany them to the Jewish Feast of Tabernacles in Judaea and He declined. Afterwards, during the feast period, He did attend, but almost in secret. This, too, caused His followers to doubt Him for, as they said, one cannot hope to deliver a message to the world if he hides himself.

Jesus asserted, in His defense, that the time for Him had not yet come.

Later, Jesus did teach in the synagogue during the feast. He argued, in support of His position that His healing (only once, He said at that time) on the Sabbath was not in violation of the Lord's command, that it was no more wrong for Him to make a man whole on the Sabbath than it was for Moses to decree that circumcision was permitted on that day.

It was difficult for the people to understand the lessons which Jesus taught them. "What does He intend to do," they asked, "when He teaches that we should not be able to find Him. Is He going to the Dispersion among the Gentiles? Is He going to teach the Gentiles?"

Near the end of the holiday, Jesus spoke to the crowds: "Let he who is thirsty drink from the living water which flows from Me, just as scripture says." Jesus at that time was actually speaking of the Spirit which would come after He had been crucified.

The people continued to argue among themselves as to whether or not Jesus was the Messiah. Some said He was. Others said He was only a prophet. Still others said He was of the devil and should be delivered to the High Priest or the officials. The Pharisees argued He was no prophet, that prophets do not come from Galilee.

8: Jesus sought refuge in the Mount of Olives, but the next day appeared in the Temple before the people. The Pharisees brought before Him a woman who had been charged with adultery. They said to Him, "Moses has decreed that such a woman be stoned. What do You say?"

There was a pause, Jesus appeared to trace a message upon the ground, and then He looked at them:

"He who is without fault shall throw the first stone."

He returned to His tracings. Almost silently, they left, first one and then another, until only the woman and Jesus remained. He asked her,

"No one accuses you?"

"No."

"Then neither do I. Go, and sin no more."

Jesus spoke to those who would listen: "I am the Light of the world."

And the Pharisees told Him, "We have only Your word on that." Jesus replied, "Under the law, the testimony of two witnesses is sufficient to prove a fact. I am a witness and My Father, who sent Me, is a witness. The fact is, therefore, proved."

Still, no one arrested Jesus. The time for His trial had not yet come.

Speaking to the Jews who remained to hear Him speak, Jesus said: "If you follow My teaching, you will be My disciples; the truth will set you free." They asked Him, "We have always been free — what do You mean?" Jesus answered that they were slaves to sin, but that now they could be free of its hold. "You," He said, "intend to kill Me, Even though I have told you the truth. That is not how Abraham, your father, acted. You should believe Me, but you do not. You are not God's children."

And the Jews asked, "Are You possessed?"

"No," said Jesus, "I honor My Father, but you have dishonored

Me. Again, I say to you, he who obeys My teaching shall never know death."

The Jews shouted back at Him, "It is true. You are possessed. Abraham is dead, the prophets are dead. Are you greater than them?" Jesus claimed, "I know the Father. I have met Abraham. I was before Abraham."

At these words, the Jews began gathering stones. Jesus, seeing their anger, and knowing what was about to happen, fled the Temple.

He had gone but a little way when He saw a blind man. His disciples asked Him whether the man's blindness was a punishment for his sin or the sins of his parents. Jesus explained that the man was born blind in order that God's power might be shown when he was cured.

"I am the Light of the world," He said, as He made a mud paste of spittle and clay and spread it across the man's eyes. He directed the blind man to wash in the waters of Siloam. The man did. He could see.

Unfortunately, the blind man had been cured upon the Sabbath, and it was not long before the Pharisees brought the man before them. At first, they did not believe the cure. They called upon his parents and friends as to the history of his illness, and they verified that the man had been blind since birth. The Pharisees renewed their interrogation of the man himself.

The man said, "I do not know what He did to me, or how He did it; all I know is that once I was blind and now I can see. If the man who cured me had not come from God, He could have done nothing."

The Pharisees, angered, cast the man from their membership. Later, Jesus sought the man out and confessed to him that He, Jesus, was the Messiah. Jesus told him, "I have come to give sight to the blind and to cover the eyes of those who can see."

"I am the door," said He, "by which the sheep shall enter the fold. I have come that men may enjoy an abundant and happy life. I am the Good Shepherd."

When the Jews of the neighborhood heard what Jesus was claiming, there was much dissension among them. "He is a demon possessed maniac," said some. "Maniacs don't cure blindness," argued His followers.

The Jews gathered around Jesus, demanding, "State your case. Quit being evasive. Are You the Messiah or not?"

"Little is accomplished in telling you anything," said Jesus, "for you do not believe. I am the Shepherd. Those who follow Me shall have eternal life. My Father has given them to Me. My Father and I are one."

As the Jews started picking up rocks to fling at Him, Jesus

continued hurriedly: "I have shown you many good deeds for which you are now going to kill Me."

The Jews yelled back, "No stone will be thrown because of any good deeds You have done. We are going to stone You for Your blasphemy, for Your claim to be a God."

In an attempt to appease their anger, Jesus plead with them in His own behalf: "In the law it is written that you, I, everyone is a god. All are gods to whom the word of God is delivered. And so, you see, I have not blasphemed by claiming to be God's Son, we are all God's children. I behave as the Father would have Me behave, so that you may know that I am in the Father and the Father is in Me."

The Jews were now infuriated that Jesus claimed a union with God, and they grabbed at Him and attempted to pen Him. But He pulled back and escaped.

Jesus retreated to a place across the Jordan. His following continued to grow despite the disputes as to His authority. When Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha, died in Bethany, Jesus went to him. Martha came to meet Him as He entered the village, saying to Him that they knew Lazarus would not have died if only Jesus had been there. Jesus told her, "Lazarus will rise again."

"Yes, on the day of final judgment," agreed Martha.

Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life."

"I believe it now," responded Martha.

Jesus commanded that the stone be rolled back from the tomb of Lazarus. When this was done, He commanded Lazarus to come out. Lazarus came out, still clad in the cotton attire in which corpses of that day were wrapped. And Lazarus was thereby resurrected.

Not all of the Jews who observed this miracle set aside their old religions and views. Some of them did, but some of them went straightaway to the Pharisees to report Lazarus' awakening.

Caiaphas, the High Priest, believed that it was better for one man to die for the nation than that the whole nation of Israel be destroyed. So, thereafter, the Priest and Council schemed and planned on ways to bring about the death of Jesus. Jesus, realizing His danger in Judaea, departed for the wastelands near Ephraim, where He continued His preaching.

12: He did not return until six days before the Passover Festival. Lazarus, Martha and Mary greeted Him joyfully, as always, and prepared a place for Him at supper. During supper, Mary anointed the feet of Jesus with expensive scented ointment, wiping the oil with her hair. A disciple protested. "It would be better for Mary to sell the perfume and give the money to the poor." "No, leave her be," admonished Jesus. "She holds the ointment for the day of My burial. I will not always be here."

The chief priests heard that Lazarus was giving refuge to Jesus

and vowed that they would make Lazarus suffer, too.

The next day, as Jesus was riding on a young ass to Jerusalem, many of those who had come to participate in the Passover Festival rushed forth to greet Him, bearing palm branches and shouting "Hosanna".

A group of Greeks attending the Festival sought out Philip, of Bethsaida, and proposed a meeting with Jesus. Philip, accompanied by Andrew, reported to Jesus that the band of Greeks wanted to have a meeting with Him. This is the answer of Jesus:

"The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. He who loves himself is lost. He who serves Me must follow Me, and will be honored by My Father."

A voice from Heaven spoke to Jesus. Some bystanders said it was thunder, others said it was an angel, and others heard no sound at all. Jesus continued speaking to those who would listen: "The voice was for your sake, not Mine. Judgment has come. I shall be lifted up."

Some of the passers-by had stopped, and a crowd had gathered. Some said to Him, "What are You saying? It is our law that the Messiah continues forever." Quickly, Jesus responded, "He who is in the dark does not know where he is. The Light is with you only a little longer and soon it will be dark," and He ran away and hid from them.

The people could not believe (in spite of the many miracles which Jesus had done before them). When Jesus spoke to them again, He taught them, "Any man who believes in Me believes also in the Father. I am the Light. I have not come to judge the world, but to save it."

The day before the Passover Festival began, Jesus had supper with His disciples. As they sat at the table, waiting to be served, Jesus obtained a basin and a towel and washed and dried the feet of His disciples, each in turn. While He worked, He told them: "A servant is not greater than his master." Then His eyes swept across the faces of His disciples and He said, sorrowfully, "One of you twelve will betray Me."

Simon Peter, Jesus' beloved disciple who was reclining next to Jesus, asked Jesus to name the one He meant. Jesus, offering Judas bread, named Judas as the one. He told Judas, then possessed of Satan, "Act quickly".

Judas left the table, and Jesus announced: "Now God is glorified through the Son of Man. I am with you now but for a short time. As I told the Jews, you cannot come where I am going. Let not your hearts be troubled; you believed in Jehovah, believe also in Me. I go to prepare a place for you. I shall come again so that you may go with Me, so that where I am you may be also.

"I am the way — I am the truth — I am the life — no one comes to the Father except by Me. Have faith. What you ask in My name

will be done. Keep My commandments. I give to you the Spirit of Truth. I will return and because I live, so also will you. I am the vine and My Father is the gardener. You are the branches. He who dwells in Me shall bear much fruit; he who does not shall die as a withered branch, to be gathered, cast on the fire, and burned.

“Love one another, as I have loved you. There is no greater love than that a man should lay down his life for a friend.

“You are My chosen ones. If you are hated, remember that they first hated Me. Do not let persecution deter you. If I had not spoken to them, they would be guiltless, but now they know, and they have no excuse for their sin. Your Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, which I shall send from the Father, will bear witness. Do not lose your faith. The Jews will turn you from the synagogue. They will kill you thinking that they follow God’s commandments.

“And so, I am leaving. If I do not go, your Comforter (Holy Spirit) will not come, but if I leave, I will be able to send Him to you. He will astound the world. He will show them how wrong they were not to believe in Me. He will guide you into all the truth. He will glorify Me. In a little while, I will be gone. The world will rejoice while you weep and suffer. When I return, the joy shall be yours. But for now, I am leaving the world and going to the Father. I have won.”

17: He looked heavenward, praying: “The hour has come, My Father. Glorify Thy Son. You have made Him king over all mankind. I have praised You here on earth. Glorify Me by being with Me, in what We had together before the world began. The disciples which You have given to Me have obeyed Your commandments. They believe that You sent Me. Protect them in Your name that they may be one as We are one. Deliver them from evil. Sanctify them. Some day, O Jehovah, may these men whose lives You gave unto Me be with Me again.”

After this prayer, Jesus and some of His disciples entered a garden on the other side of Cedron Brook. There Judas, with a band of men and officers from the Jewry, found him. Jesus asked them who they were looking for. They answered that they were looking for Jesus of Nazareth, and He replied, “I am He”.

Simon Peter undertook to defend, striking out with a sword and severing the right ear of the High Priest’s servant, Malchus. Jesus restrained him, then submitted Himself to the arresting officers without any resistance. They brought Jesus before Annas, father-in-law of Caiaphas, High Priest.

Peter and another disciple followed the crowd onto the grounds outside the place where Jesus’ fate was being decided. The doorkeeper asked Peter whether he was one of the disciples. Peter denied that he was.

Inside, Jesus explained that He was a teacher, having always

taught in the synagogues. Annas bound Him and sent Him to Caiaphas, the High Priest.

In the courtyard, someone again asked Peter, "Are you a disciple?" He said he was not, but they insisted, "surely, you are the one in the garden." Peter's denial had barely left his lips when a cock crew.

Caiaphas took Jesus to Governor Pilate's offices, but they did not take Jesus inside because the Jews believed that if they entered the home of a Gentile they would become defiled. (If they were defiled, they could not participate in the Passover Feast.) So they held Jesus outside and asked Pilate to come out. It was cool. Pilate suggested that the Jews punish Jesus themselves, but they answered that they were not allowed, under Roman rule, to decree death as a punishment. Pilate interrogated Jesus.

Jesus would not admit that He was the King of the Jews. Instead, He told Pilate: "My kingdom is not of this world." Pilate turned to the Jewish people waiting outside his offices and told them that he was unable to find anything wrong with the man. "You have a custom," he reminded the Jewish audience, "that a prisoner be released during the Passover. Shall I set Jesus free?" The crowd shouted, "Release Barabbas to us. Crucify Jesus."

19: Pilate ordered that Jesus first be whipped. After the soldiers had scourged Him, mocked Him, spit upon and beat Him, they dressed Him in a purple robe, placed a crown of thorns upon His head, and turned Him over to the Jews for crucifixion.

The Jews claimed: "We have a law — Blasphemy; and he who violates that law by claiming he is the Son of God shall die."

Jesus carried His own cross to the Place of the Skull, where He was crucified. Two thieves were crucified at the same time, one on each side of Him. Pilate's men placed a sign upon the cross of Jesus which read: "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews".

The soldiers divided Jesus' clothing between them, and that which they could not divide, they gave to him who won the casting of lots. There was a disciple whom Jesus loved, and as Jesus, hanging on the cross, looked across the crowd, He saw this disciple standing near His mother and Mary, wife of Cleophas, and Mary of Magdalene. (After the crucifixion, Mary [Jesus' mother] continued to live in the home of that beloved disciple.)

From the cross, Jesus moaned: "I thirst." He tasted the vinegar which was held up to His lips on the end of a pole. A short time later, He stirred and sighed: "It is finished," and ended His life.

The Jews were concerned that the bodies of the cross should not be hanging there on the day of the Sabbath. They requested Pilate to have his soldiers break the legs of the condemned in order that their deaths would be hastened and the bodies could be removed before the end of the day. The soldiers broke the legs of the thieves, but it appeared to them that Jesus was already dead, so they

stabbed Him in the side with a spear. There flowed from the side of Jesus a stream of blood and water. (This was witnessed by an eye witness who swears it's so. You can rely on his testimony.)

That evening, Joseph of Arimathaea sought and obtained from Pilate permission to move the body of Jesus. He, with Nicodemus, wrapped Jesus' body in cotton cloth sprinkled with myrrh and placed Him in a hillside cave.

Sunday morning, Mary Magdalene came to the tomb. She noticed immediately that the large stone which had covered the cave entrance had been moved. She ran back to get Peter and that disciple who was particularly loved by Jesus. Together, they hurried into the cave; they found the tomb empty except for linen wrappings and a head napkin.

The disciples returned home, but Mary stood there weeping. Soon she realized that she was not alone, for there were two angels, both dressed in white, sitting at the place where Jesus had lain. Then she saw Jesus. At first, she thought He was the cemetery attendant. "What," she asked, "did you do with the body of Jesus?" Jesus spoke and she recognized Him. He said, "I am now ascending to My Father. Go tell My brothers."

Mary of Magdala went straightaway to the disciples and told them.

In the evening of the same day, the disciples were behind locked doors, hiding from the Jews, when Jesus came to them: "Peace unto you," He said. He showed them His hands and the hole in His side, and announced: "I give you the Holy Ghost. Henceforth, you shall have the power to forgive or condemn a man for his sins."

The disciple Thomas was not present on the occasion when Jesus came to them, but a week later, at the same place, Jesus came again when Thomas was there. Thomas was skeptical. Jesus directed him: "Put your finger here and observe My hands. Put your hand into My side. Now, believe."

And Thomas exclaimed, "My Lord — My God!"

Jesus said, "Blessed are they who have never seen Me and yet have believed."

Shortly thereafter, Peter, Thomas, Nathanael, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together near the Sea of Tiberias, fishing. By dawn's light, they saw Jesus on the beach. They did not recognize Him. He yelled suggestions: "Throw the net over the right side." They followed His advice and the net became so full of fish that they could not pull it on deck. Then, Jesus' beloved disciple realized that He was the Lord and exclaimed to Peter. Peter plunged into the sea. When they reached shore, Jesus, standing near a hot fire, commanded that they bring some fish for cooking. He divided the bread and fish and bid them eat.

Jesus asked Peter, "Do you love Me more than the other

disciples do?" "Yes," said Peter. "Then feed them" said Jesus. Three times Jesus asked the question. Three times Peter gave an affirmative answer. Three times Jesus commanded him the same. Then Jesus said to Peter, "When you are old you will stretch out your arms; a stranger will bind you and carry you away." (This was said as a sign to show how Peter would die.)

Jesus said, "Follow Me." As Peter watched, the disciple whom Jesus particularly loved followed after Jesus.

And it is this same disciple who writes this book — we know that he is a man of truth, and what he says is fact.

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES

Comment

One might well reflect that the author of John wrote with the attitude and style of one a foreigner to Jewish people, custom, and place, and ask, "Did John, son of Zebedee, a Jew living within Jewish custom and territory, write this book?"

That difficulty is not encountered with Luke. That a Gentile, not a Jew, set down these accounts is evident from the accounts themselves. Probably written originally in Greek, the gospel of Luke purports to narrate historical accounts collected by a Gentile. The author extended his record beyond the passion story by listing some of the activities of the disciples after the crucifixion. That portion of Luke's book was severed at an early date and called "Acts of the Apostles".

This script was one among numerous others of similar content, including Acts of Andrew, Acts of Thomas, Acts of Peter, and Philip's Chronicles. Through use and selection by church hierarchy, Luke's writing alone has survived. It was included in the Canon at an early date.

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1: To Theophilus: Previously, I wrote you of what Jesus taught and accomplished until He ascended into Heaven. After His crucifixion, He visited His disciples — for forty days He was with them, telling them about God's kingdom. He forecast that they would receive the Holy Ghost and witness for Him in Jerusalem, Judaea, Samaria, and in every corner of the world.

When He completed His visit, He ascended into a cloud. As they were watching His ascent, there appeared beside them two men dressed in white, who told them that Jesus had been taken to Heaven and would return in the same manner that He left.

The apostles returned to Jerusalem. Peter, John, James, Andrew, Philip, Thomas, Bartholomew, Matthew, James, Simon, Judas (not Judas Iscariot), the mother of Jesus and a group of women who had followed along with the apostles, lived, met and prayed together. One day, Peter suggested: "We must choose one from amongst us to replace Judas Iscariot." (Judas had bought land with his thirty pieces of silver, and one day, as he stood on his purchase, he fell, in acute pain — his bowels coming out of his body as he died — the land was later called the Field of Blood.)

Joseph (Barsabas) and Matthias were nominated and, on the drawing of the lots, Matthias was selected.

Suddenly, from the sky came the sound of rushing wind and an apparition bearing blades of fire came among them. Filled with the Holy Spirit, the members of the assemblage began to talk in tongues. A crowd, attracted by the noise, gathered outside the

hall. They were amazed. "How can these Galileans speak the language of the Parthians, Medes, Elamites, Mesopotamians, Judeans, Cappadocians, Asians, Phrygians, Pamphylans, Egyptians, Libyans, Cretans, and Arabians?" But others scoffed, "They are all drunk."

Then Peter addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews, we are not drunk. We are fulfillment of Joel's prophecy. For God said that His people should be filled with the Holy Spirit and prophecy, and the peoples of the earth would receive signs upon earth, including blood, fire and smoke from the sky. The sun shall be blotted out, the moon shall become blood. Listen to me, you Israelites, you who killed the Son of God, Jesus has been resurrected. Repent and be baptized."

In those days many marvels and signs occurred daily through the work of the apostles. The apostles sold their possessions and shared their daily fare with each other, and every day new converts joined them.

One day Peter and John, calling upon Jesus Christ, cured a cripple. The townspeople gathered about, gaping in awe at what had been accomplished. Peter spoke to them again: "Israelites, this man walks again because of the power of Jesus whom you, yourself, brought to trial in Pilate's court, condemned and killed. But He was resurrected and through Him, we have cured the cripple. You may have acted in ignorance, but you know better now, so repent and accept Jehovah's son."

The priests and some of the Sadducees were members of the audience and, irked by the sermon, caused Peter and his fellows to be placed in jail. The next day, they brought the disciples before them for judgment. Peter repeated his accusation. "Yes," he charged, "it was you who murdered Jesus Christ, who is now raised from the dead. Yes, it was through Him the cripple was made whole."

The Court ordered that the apostles no longer teach or sermonize in the name of Jesus and released them. The apostles went directly from the Court's custody to their meeting place and, united with the Holy Spirit through prayer, spoke, as witnesses, of the resurrection of Jesus.

They continued to share each other's property and effects.

Barnabas inherited some property. He sold it and delivered the sales proceeds to the apostles. Ananias and his wife, Sapphira, owned property also, but when they sold theirs, they retained a portion of the profits and lied about it to the apostles. Peter, discovering this, examined Ananias and Sapphira individually and at length. During the interrogation, both were stricken dead. The young men of the sect carried the bodies from the meeting place and buried them. So it didn't pay to withhold anything.

As the apostles continued to preach in the community, they won

over many of the townspeople. In parts of the territory, they were treated with great respect. Some of the afflicted lay on their beds in the street in the hope that the shadow of Peter might fall on them as he walked by. The people in the surrounding villages brought their loved ones who were sick or possessed by devils. Through the apostles, the ills were cured, and the unclean spirits exorcised from the "possessed".

The High Priest resented this encroachment upon his ministry. Once he put the apostles in prison. During the night an angel came and opened the doors, and the next morning the twelve were at their accustomed place in the Temple.

So the High Priest sent guards who arrested the apostles again and brought them before the Council. One of the prosecutors said to the prisoners: "You have been ordered to cease your teaching. You continue to harass the Jewish people and their leaders with accusations that they murdered Jesus Christ. What is your explanation for your disobedience?"

Peter replied: "We are witness to the resurrection of Jesus, whom you killed by crucifixion."

The Jewish leaders, stung by the charge, were inclined to order execution of the twelve. But Gamaliel (a Pharisee teacher) urged caution in dealing with the apostles, asserting that if the movement was of human design it would soon fail of itself and if of God, they could not stop it. The Council commanded the contumaces to speak no more of Jesus and let them off with a whipping. When they were released, the apostles resumed their preaching as before.

6: Disagreements and bickering broke out among the followers of the apostles, particularly between the Greeks and the Hebrews. To settle these differences, the group appointed seven of the membership, some Greek, some Jew, to handle the distribution of food and property among them. These seven were Stephen, Philip, Prochorus, Nicanor, Timon, Parmenas, and Nicolas (of Antioch). Thereafter, the quarrels ceased and the sect continued to prosper.

Stephen was vigorous and dedicated. His activities produced many miracles and signs. A few Cyrenians and Alexandrians, others from Cilicia and Asia, and those from the Synagogue of Libertines, attempted from time to time to argue with Stephen concerning the law. He bettered them in debate. Jealous and bitter, they reported that he had made blasphemous statements against Moses and God. He was arrested and brought before the Jewish Council. False witnesses testified against him, saying that Stephen had claimed that Jesus of Nazareth would destroy the Temple and change the laws of Moses. Then the Court gave Stephen an opportunity to speak.

"My Jewish brothers," he began, "at God's command,

Abraham left Mesopotamia and migrated to this land which God promised to give him in exchange for the covenant of circumcision and the obedience due Him. From Abraham was born Isaac, who beget Jacob, who became the father of the Twelve Patriarchs.

"One of the twelve, Joseph, was sold into slavery, carried to Egypt, and there became, through skill and circumstance, an important official of that nation. Then, when famine came to the lands occupied by his brothers, Joseph saved his family from starvation by bringing them into his care. The family and their descendants became enslaved upon change in Egypt's rulers, but finally escaped through Moses, their great leader. Across a divided Red Sea they went, and when they had crossed, at the will of Moses the sea came together again, destroying the vast Egyptian armies which pursued them.

"At their first encampment they gave thanks, not to the God who saved them, but to the bull calf, offering sacrifices to the idol. Jehovah turned His head while they worshipped other gods, and later, after they had spent forty years in the desert and entered the promised land He had given them, He told them: 'During your forty years in the desert, you did not worship Me, but knelt at the shrine of Moloch and the idol of Rephan. For this you will be deported to the other side of Babylon'.

"In the desert, our ancestors worshipped in the Tabernacle. After occupying the promised land, they made their sacrifices in the Temple built by Solomon.

"As everyone knows, the Most High does not live in man-made Temples, for He says, according to the prophets, 'Heaven is My throne and earth is My footstool'.

"And here you still are," Stephen said to the Jewish High Priest and the Jewish brethren, "still stubborn, sinful and ignorant. Won't you ever listen? You have betrayed and murdered the Redeemer. You have not kept the law of God."

His accusers were stunned. Enraged by Stephen's accusations, the judges and their kinsmen charged him. Stephen looked heavenward shouting, "I see the Son of Man standing at God's right hand." He could say no more for they were upon him. They seized him and dragged, shoved, kicked, and carried him to the city limits where they stoned him to death. As he died, Stephen, on his knees, prayed aloud, "God, do not blame them for this sin."

8: A man named Saul watched the execution of Stephen and applauded. He, himself, had begun to persecute the new religious sect. Through his position, he was able to arrest and imprison many of the followers, both men and women. To escape him, they scattered throughout the country.

Philip fled to Samaria. The townspeople thronged to hear his message. He effected many cures. He exorcised evil spirits, who came out of the possessed with loud cries. Philip's power of

persuasion was so great that even Simon, who had, with his magical feats and arts, a considerable following of his own, became converted and baptized.

The news of Philip's success reached Jerusalem. Peter and John rushed to Samaria to join him in expanding the work. The people there had only been baptized. When Peter and John arrived, they laid their hands upon the people, who thereby received the Holy Ghost.

Simon offered to buy from the apostles the power they appeared to possess. The apostles were appalled. "Repent," they told Simon, and Simon did.

Having established the sect, the apostles returned to Jerusalem. Philip, at the command of one of Jehovah's angels, journeyed southward toward Gaza. During the trip, Philip met an Ethiopian eunuch, who was busy reading Isaiah. Philip converted and baptized the eunuch, and,

Lo! When they came up out of the water, Philip was whisked away to Azotus by holy spirits! The eunuch wondered where he had gone. Philip went from city to city, preaching, all the way into Caesarea.

Saul continued his persecutions. Once, on a trip to Damascus, the sky lit up with streaks of fire, and Saul, terrified, fell to the ground. From the light came a voice, "Saul, why do you persecute Me?" Other men accompanying Saul could see no one, although they heard the voice.

Saul, blinded by the occurrence, was led into Damascus by his fellow travelers. He fasted for three days. Ananias, who had received instructions from the Lord in a vision, visited him, put his hands upon him and cured his blindness. He was baptized and ate.

Saul visited the disciples in Damascus. Soon, with them, he was speaking in Jesus' behalf in the synagogues. He was a persuasive speaker and was victorious in debate against the Jews of that city. The Jews schemed to take his life. Saul, however, learned of their plan, and escaped the city when friends lowered him in a basket from the city walls. He hastened to Jerusalem to join the followers of Jesus.

The disciples were leery of the man Saul (later called Paul), remembering his past prosecutions of them. But Barnabas boldly welcomed him and through Barnabas, Saul was introduced to, and became part of, the apostolic group. In the streets he fiercely debated the Greeks, and soon they and the Jews were planning his murder. He slipped away to Tarsus where he hoped to find a milder climate.

The churches in Judaea, Galilee and Samaria continued to grow. Peter himself maintained regular visits to the meeting places of the new sect where he performed many miracles and

gave encouragement to the gatherings. In Lydda, Peter cured, in the name of Jesus Christ, a man who had been bedridden with paralysis for eight years. Many new converts were thereby won.

At Joppa, Peter, through prayer, brought to life a dead woman named Tabitha, who was well known to the community for her kindness and good works. Therefore, many converts were won to the new religion there, also.

In Caesarea, a Roman centurion named Cornelius had a vision. In it, an angel directed that he, a Roman, should send to Joppa for Simon Peter, the Jew, who at that time was living with a tanner, also named Simon.

While Cornelius was having his vision in Joppa, Peter, praying on the roof of the home in which he was staying, also saw an apparition. What Peter saw was a great four-cornered cloth being lowered to the ground from the sky and upon which there were all sorts of animals, birds and insects.

A voice said to Peter: "Now, Peter, kill and eat." But Peter protested, "No, God, I do not eat that which is defiled, whether common or unclean." God answered Peter three times: "What God orders for you as clean is not to be counted by you as unclean." Then the vision was ended.

So when the servants of the Roman Centurion came to Peter and invited him to Caesarea to speak to a Gentile audience, Peter went. "Although a Jew is forbidden to associate with a man of another race, and in fact, by his belief, he will thereby become defiled, yet I have been shown by a vision from God that it is not for me to say that any man is common or unclean. Therefore, although you are Gentiles, I can speak with you."

The Gentiles asked Peter to explain his religion to them.

Peter recited: "God will accept the righteous of all nations, not just the Israelites. It was through the Israelites that He delivered the news of peace through Jesus Christ. You have heard about John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth. You know that Jesus died, but was raised to life on the third day, and has appeared to witnesses who ate and drank with Him after He rose from the dead. Through His commands, His followers are telling everyone that they who believe in Him shall receive forgiveness of their sins."

The Gentiles who listened became endowed with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in tongues, to the astonishment of many of those Jews who had accompanied Peter to the meeting. Peter said, "See, the Gentiles have obviously received the Holy Ghost. It is not right that we should withhold baptism from them." The Gentiles were baptized.

11: When the Christian Jews in Judaea heard what had happened, they summoned Peter before them in Jerusalem and accused him of associating with the uncircumcised and violating

their religious laws. But Peter told them what had happened, about the visions, and the Holy Spirit coming upon Gentiles, and they were satisfied.

About this time, other followers in Antioch began to preach to Gentile listeners. Many of the Gentiles believed. As the Church grew, it attracted the attention of the leaders in Jerusalem. They sent Barnabas to Antioch to aid in the growth of the Church. Barnabas sought out Saul in Tarsus and brought him to Antioch also, and they lived there a year together developing a Church following. Here, for the first time, the believers in the new religion were called Christians.

Once, during the stay of Barnabas and Saul in Antioch, a prophet named Agabus, from Jerusalem (prophets from Jerusalem were constantly attending the Antioch meetings), predicted a severe, worldwide famine (which later occurred during the reign of Claudius). In anticipation of the famine, the congregation at Antioch collected funds from among them and sent the funds, by Barnabus and Saul, to the Christians in Judaea.

King Herod arrested James (John's brother) and Peter. He had James executed. While Peter was in prison, waiting trial, tied with chains and stationed between two soldiers, an angel appeared, freed him, and led him into the street. He rushed to Mary's house (John Mark's mother) where a meeting of members of his sect was in progress. He told them what had happened and fled.

The next morning, Herod caused a search of the city. When he was unable to find Peter, he ordered the execution of Peter's former guards. Then Herod went to Caesarea, and while making a speech there, wherein he declared himself to be a God, he fell dead, full of worms.

Barnabas, Saul and John Mark returned toward Jerusalem.

These three began a journey establishing, and augmenting the growth of, churches on their way. They came first to Seleucia, then Cyprus. In Cyprus, they were opposed by Bar-Jesus, a sorcerer who proclaimed himself to be a prophet. Saul cursed him as they stood facing each other in debate before the Governor of the island, and decreed that Bar-Jesus should be blind for a while. While Bar-Jesus groped about, the Governor saw — and believed.

John returned to Jerusalem. Barnabas and Paul continued on to Perga. On the Sabbath day they attended the synagogue and participated in hearing and reading the Law, the prophets, and the message of the priest. Occasionally, Paul was given permission to speak and he would say: "My fellow Jews, listen. God chose the Israelites. He delivered them from Egypt. He delivered to them the land of Canaan and judges to govern them. He gave them a king and through that heirship a Savior, Jesus.

"We are the people destined to receive salvation. Those in

Jerusalem and their leaders did not understand, but in condemning Him, they fulfilled the prophecies for our redemption. When He was placed in a tomb, having been crucified, He was (in three days) raised from the dead. He appeared to witnesses who now bring you the glad tidings. It is through Him that those who have faith are saved. Under the Law of Moses, as you know, there was no salvation."

Paul (Saul) won many followers (from the synagogue meetings). As more and more of the people left the synagogues, forsaking the teachings of the officials of the various assemblies, those officials became jealous and plotted against Paul and Barnabas. They disputed the assertions of Paul absolutely.

Finally — they refused to allow Paul or Barnabas to speak in the synagogues.

Paul warned them: "You, as Jewish officials, have received the Word of God. Since you reject it, you are unworthy to have eternal life. We will deliver our message to the Gentiles."

The Gentiles heard the announcement and were delighted. They encouraged Paul to meet and speak with them. Many became believers.

The Jews, through the city fathers and many of the women in the neighborhoods, were able to incite resentment among the townspeople and, as a result, Paul and Barnabas were thrown out of the community.

14: Paul and Barnabas went to Iconium to stay and had the same experience there. The Jews, through the town leaders, recruited a mob for stoning them, but the two evangelists heard about it and escaped to Lystra.

At Lystra, Paul commanded a crippled man, who had been handicapped from birth, to stand up and walk. There, in the presence of the crowd, the man did so. The Lystrans believed Paul to be a god and named him Mercury. They called Barnabas Jupiter. The officials scheduled an assembly of the townspeople for sacrificial rites to them. Barnabas and Paul stopped them, explaining that they were not gods.

A very short time later some of the Jews from Antioch and Iconium came to Lystra and spoke to the people about Paul. Those same churchmen who proposed to worship Paul as Mercury became part of an incited mob who stoned Paul and left him for dead.

Some of the believers found him, revived him, and took him back into the city. The next day, he and Barnabas departed for Derbe. They revisited Lystra, Iconium, Antioch, journeyed to Pisidia, Perga, Attalia, and then returned to Antioch again where they reported the success which they had had with the Gentiles.

15: There was animosity and division among the believers of the new sect, Christianity. Many Jewish Christians who had

come to Antioch from Judaea taught that circumcision was necessary to salvation. Paul and Barnabas taught that it was not necessary. The dispute between them was bitter and avidly pursued. So it was decided among them that they should send messengers to Jerusalem to ask the Church there to decide the question.

The question was presented. The Pharisees contended, "To be a Christian, one must be circumcised; the Law of Moses must be followed." Peter argued: "Friends, as you know, the Gentiles heard the Gospel message from my mouth, believed and received the Holy Spirit. You see, God has made no difference between the Gentiles and us. They, too, by faith, were purified. Do not put upon these new believers in our Church a burden which they cannot bear."

James, speaking for the Church Council, ruled: "We shouldn't lay bothersome burdens (requirements of circumcision) upon our new Gentile converts. We will write them that they should, however, abstain from anything which idols have touched, from eating meat sacrificed to idols, from fornication, and from eating meat of an animal that has been strangled (from drinking blood)."

By resolution of the Church body, led by the apostles and elders, the Church sent that message to the Gentiles who were meeting as Christians in the synagogues in Antioch, Syria, and Cilicia. Paul and Barnabas returned to Antioch with the messengers, delivered the message to jubilant Gentiles, then remained there to teach and preach for several years.

One day, Paul and Barnabas argued heatedly over John Mark. While Barnabas wished to associate with John Mark, Paul claimed that he did not trust the man who had once deserted them, and he chose for his companion a man named Silas.

And so they separated, Barnabas and Mark going to Cyprus, and Paul and Silas taking a tour through Syria and Cilicia

In Derbe, Paul recruited a man named Timotheus, and caused him to be circumcised (Timotheus' father was a Gentile.) Although a Spirit prevented Paul and his companions from entering Asia and Bithynia, they visited Mysia and cities in the Galatian area, finally arriving at Troas on the Mediterranean coast.

Paul had a vision in which a Macedonian invited him to Macedonia, so the parties set about obtaining transportation across the sea. First, to Samothracia, then Neapolis, and then to Philippi (a Roman colony). There, a woman named Lydia listened to Paul and was converted, and then insisted that Paul and his company stay at her home.

Soon after, while Paul was speaking in one of the public places of the city, a slave girl, possessed by a demon, followed him about and interrupted him constantly. Paul ordered the evil spirit which

was within the slave girl to come forth. It came out.

The owners of the slave girl were angry that the character of their slave had been changed. They arrested Paul and Silas and brought them before the city magistrates. These officers, leading a mob, stripped the two evangelists of their clothing, had them whipped and thrown into prison.

That night, as Paul and Silas were praying, there came an earthquake which broke open the prison doors and loosened the chains of all the prisoners therein. The prison keeper trembled and fell pleading at the feet of Paul and Silas. They spoke to him and he became converted. He took them home with him and gave them refuge; they spoke to his family and baptized them.

The next morning, the magistrates ordered that Paul and Silas be released. Paul informed the officials that they were Roman citizens. The magistrates, alarmed, asked their forgiveness, and escorted them out of the city.

The two travelers, with their company, arrived at Thessalonica via Apollonia and went to speak in the synagogues. They persuaded some of the Jews and many Greeks to become Christians.

The Jewish priests and attendants were jealous and angry. They roused a mob which, failing to locate Paul and Silas in the city, took their vengeance upon Jason and other Christians. Paul and Silas escaped to Berea, where they were more gently received. Many of the Gentiles, women and men, came to believe. When trouble began, Paul and his friend proceeded to Athens.

Paul debated the Epicurean and Stoick philosophers in public places of the city and the Jews in their synagogues. The Hellenists, generally, were interested in hearing about the theories and ideas of other philosophers and Paul was invited to present his views at the rostrum of Areopagus on Mars' Hill.

Standing boldly before them, he spoke: "God does not live in man-made Temples. Idols are for naught. God created everything. We are His offspring. He commands all of us to repent. On the day of judgment each of us will be judged by One He has ordained, whom He has already raised from the dead."

While many in his audience scoffed, a few, notably Dionysius (a Court member) and Damaris, a woman, believed.

From Athens, Paul went to Corinth where he met Aquila, a Jew who had been deported under Emperor Claudius' decree that Jews should leave Rome. He began a residency, he and Aquila engaging in the business of tent making, and teaching on the Sabbath to Jew and Greek. They were joined later, finally, by Silas and Timotheus.

The Jews would not believe his claim that Jesus was the Messiah. He told them, "Alright, if you won't believe me, I shall go to the Gentiles. It is you who will be the loser."

Many Corinthians thereafter became believers as Paul preached to them in the public places of Corinth. Jehovah visited Paul and encouraged him to keep up the good work.

The complaints of the Jews to Governor Gallio fell on deaf ears. He refused to take sides in their religious disputes. Afterwards Paul, with Priscilla and Aquila, left Corinth for Syria, stopping in Cenchrea, Ephesus, Caesarea, Antioch, and Phrygia.

While they were in Ephesus, the trio met a Jew named Apollos, from Alexandria, a philosopher, learned and knowledgeable. He preached of John the Baptist, the scriptures, and the Lord (although having no previous knowledge of Jesus), and was able to speak even more eloquently when he had heard the story of Jesus from Priscilla. His logic and delivery of speech were effective in scriptural debates against the Jews.

Meanwhile, Paul was traveling through the regions around Ephesus, baptizing those who had previously been baptized only by John; as soon as Paul laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit descended into them, they spoke in tongues, and they prophesied.

Paul stayed there about two years. At times, items of clothing which Paul had touched were taken to the bedside of those who were sick or placed in the hands of those who were possessed by evil spirits. Those who were ill became well, and those who were possessed of demons were cleansed as the evil spirits came from them.

Some of the wandering Jewish evangelists and prophets attempted to use the name of Jesus in curing the sick or exorcising the demons from the possessed. Once, seven brothers (sons of a Jewish priest) spoke to the demons within a man. They, together, ordered that the demon come forth from the man "in the name of Jesus, Lord of Paul".

The demon answered, "I have heard of Jesus and Paul, but who are you?" It came out of the man, battered them about, and chased them, naked and wounded, down the street.

When the townspeople and those in and about the city learned what had happened, they were impressed. Many who had theretofore practiced magic, used spells, and possessed tokens of sorcery, renounced their evil ways and burned their books or destroyed their tools of magic.

19:21 Paul's success in Ephesus caused some concern. Demetrius, a silversmith, called a meeting of the skilled and semi-skilled labor who was involved in the manufacture and distribution of silver idols, particularly the idol of the Goddess Diana, and explained to them how Paul was soliciting the populace to refrain from the use and purchase of such items.

The aroused workers roamed the streets looking for Paul and his companions, but found only Gaius and Aristarchus. They dragged them into the Great Hall. One of the city officials,

however, spoke to the crowd and suggested that Demetrius and the workers seek redress in accord with legal procedures. The disturbance was thereby quelled and the crowd dissipated.

Timotheus and Aristarchus had gone to Macedonia; Paul, beginning a journey for Jerusalem for the purpose of attending a religious festival there, joined them.

While Paul was speaking to a group there, preparatory for his departure the next day, one of the young men fell from the window ledge to the ground three stories below. Paul went to him, a lad named Eutychus, and took the dead man in his arms;

Lo! Life to the man was restored.

Paul planned to be in Jerusalem on the Day of Pentecost. Even so, he took the time to make last minute counseling of the elders of the Ephesus congregation. Then he sailed for Coos, then to Rhodes, and on to Patara. There his party transferred to a ship bound for Phoenicia, arriving at Tyre. They sought out some of the disciples and sojourned a week with them.

The disciples warned Paul to stay away from Jerusalem, but Paul paid no heed, and the party boarded the vessel and sailed to Caesarea, where they met Philip and stayed with him. Philip had four unmarried daughters who could prophesy. There was also Agabus, a prophet from Judaea. The prophets predicted to Paul that he would be captured and handed over to the Gentiles. They urged Paul to cancel his trip to Jerusalem.

But Paul paid no attention. He, with his companions, continued to Jerusalem, where they were happily received by our brothers.

21:21 The next day, James, in the presence of the brotherhood, said to Paul: "Observe if you will, Paul, how many thousands of believers there are here, and all of them believe in the Law of Moses. We have heard that your teaching is not the same as ours, that you, instead, tell the Jews to turn their backs upon Moses, give up circumcising of their children, and surrender the way of life they have known as Jews.

"Having heard this about you, we are concerned for your safety. So we want you to go with four of our brothers and purify yourself in the customary ceremony, including the shaving of heads. In that way, everyone here will know that the stories we have heard about you were false — they will know that you are a religious Jew — a believing Jew — and that you, yourself, are a keeper of the law."

So Paul, accompanied by the four men, entered the Temple and participated in the prescribed rites in order to show that he was a Jew, but his attempt at the proof of his belief ended in confusion. Some of the Asian Jews saw him there, grabbed him and held him up before the crowd attending the Temple ceremonies, shouting: "Israelites, this is the man (Paul) who speaks against our Jewish doctrine, who belittles our law, and who snubs our Temple. He has

even brought Greeks into the Temple itself and thereby defiled it.” (Paul had not — they thought he had.)

Some nearest Paul dragged him from the Temple area — and from all over the city, people hurriedly came, half-dressed, confused and shouting. The crowd of Jews and Jewish Christians were yelling for Paul’s death, and some began to beat him.

A small detachment of Roman soldiers pushed their way into the rabble, picked up Paul, and carried him into their quarters. Then the soldiers restored order among the peoples assembled there, and Paul was given an opportunity to speak to them.

“Brothers,” he shouted, “I am a Jew, born and reared. Once, I was a persecuter of the Christians, as you well know, but Jesus came to me in a vision and commanded that I should persecute no longer; thereafter, in this very Temple, Jesus ordered that I leave Jerusalem to speak in His behalf to the Gentiles, for, as He said, I would not be believed in Jerusalem.”

Angered, the crowd began to shout, “Death to him,” and they began screaming and jostling about so that Paul was no longer able to speak. The soldiers, dragging Paul, retreated into their quarters. As they were about to flog him, Paul asked them, “Are you going to whip me, a Roman citizen?” The whip was laid down immediately, and Paul was secured while the commandant was deciding what to do.

The next day, at a public meeting, he brought Paul before him.

Paul told them that he was a Pharisee. The Pharisees, who believe in a life after death, and the Sadducees, who believed that there is no resurrection, nor angel, nor spirit, began to argue with each other. The chief captain took Paul back into his quarters, away from the crowd which had now begun to fight each other.

That night, God appeared to Paul and encouraged him to speak up in His, God’s, behalf, not only in Jerusalem, but also in Rome.

The next day, conspiring Jewish citizens circulated in the courtyard outside the soldiers’ quarters where Paul was kept. They intended to kill Paul at their first opportunity. The captain sent Paul, with a company of 470 soldiers, to Caesarea for action of the Governor. A number of the Jews, led by High Priest Ananias, followed, in order to petition the Governor that Paul be executed.

Felix, the Governor, would make no immediate decision. For two years, he kept Paul in his custody and, from time to time, would bring him forth and let him speak on his religious views. Finally, Felix was succeeded by Festus, who invited some of the Jewish leaders to appear and make their complaint against Paul again.

Paul denied the charges of the Jews that he had violated their law. Festus asked Paul if he was willing to stand trial on the Jewish charges before him in Jerusalem. Paul was not willing. “I

appeal to Caesar," he said. "To Caesar you shall go," replied Festus.

27: On the trip to Rome, the sailing vessel in which Paul was riding ran into heavy seas. Paul warned the officer in charge that they would sustain extensive damage to the ship and freight and their lives would be jeopardized. The officer paid no attention and the ship continued. Soon, as they sailed along the coast of Crete, they ran into heavy winds from the land side which forced the ship out to sea.

They rode onward on turbulent waters, throwing much of the cargo overboard to lighten the load. They worked without eating and, indeed, much of the food washed overboard. Then Paul spoke: "I told you this would happen. But don't despair. God's angel came to me last night and assured me that I would reach Rome."

The boat was still being driven by the wind although it appeared, from various soundings, that land must be near. So they anchored. The sailors attempted to drop the lifeboat and desert the ship. Paul spotted the conspiracy and advised one of the Roman officers, who stopped the attempt by setting free the lifeboat. Paul urged those on board to eat, and they did. The next day, they beached the ship, jumped overboard, and swam to shore, safe at last.

We (Paul and company) had landed at Melita (Malta). Paul was building a fire when a poisonous snake sunk its fangs in his hand. Paul threw the snake into the fire. Several of the townspeople observed Paul for a while, waiting for him to drop dead. When he did not do so, they said to themselves, "He is a god".

The mayor of the island, Publius, became our host for three days. Paul, through prayer and laying of hands upon the man, healed Publius' father of fever and dysentery.

When we arrived in Rome, the Christians met us. Paul was permitted to live alone in the custody of a soldier. At a meeting of the Jewish leaders three days after his arrival, Paul told them: "Brothers, here I am a prisoner, bound in the cause for Israel." They invited him to speak again after others of their numbers had gathered. (The Jews there had not been informed of the thinking of the Jews of Jerusalem.)

Paul spoke to them of God's kingdom, the Law of Moses, the prophets, and Jesus. He was able to convince many of them, but others would not turn from their Jewish practice.

Paul said: "Like the Holy Spirit said to your fathers through Isaiah — you hear but will not understand — you see but you do not perceive — your mind is dull — your eyes and ears are closed."

Then he announced: "Therefore, I say unto you — God's salvation has been sent to the Gentiles — the Gentiles will listen

— I will speak to them.”

Paul stayed in Rome for two years, teaching throughout (Gentile) Rome without interference.

* * * * *

ROMANS

Comment

Outside the Hebrew scripture, there is no evidence that Noah, Abraham, or even Moses ever existed. Historic records contemporaneous with Jesus' time contain no account of Him, either, other than an incidental reference by Josephus, 1st Century Jewish historian, and a few scattered statements in other writings of activities and claims of His followers in His name.

There is no such lack of attestation concerning the man, Paul, otherwise known as Saul of Tarsus. His verified activities in his travels throughout the nations bordering the Mediterranean left an indelible mark upon the world. Of small stature, stooped, perhaps crippled, long-nosed, ugly, and often ill, the man tenaciously pursued the vocation he had chosen.

In Jewish synagogues and Gentile courts, he argued against the claims of Jewish Christians that the new religion was for the exclusive benefit of the circumcised. In Greek and Roman public forums, he proposed that Yahweh, the personal God of an insignificant, superstitious, bickering people, was also the God of all mankind, to the exclusion of Zeus, Jupiter and all others. In Rome and Asia Minor, he faced the Jews in the presence of Gentile audiences and, over their vehement denial, proclaimed Jesus the Savior of Jewish scripture.

And he won Gentiles to his cause in large numbers.

But his most effective ministry, by far, was in his letters. It is said that of the fourteen books (Romans through Philemon) attributed to him, he wrote only a part. The part, whatever it was, eventually grew to become the foundation and framework of Christendom. Suggestions made by him in the epistles, however casually made and irregardless of the circumstances under which it was said, have been seized upon by various divisions of the church as God's command, itself. Consider Romans, written about 58 A.D.

ROMANS

1: From Paul, servant of Jesus Christ,

To you in Rome. I mention you often in my prayers to God; would that I could be with you. I have been unable to visit you because I have been very busy attending my obligations to Greek and barbarian, to those who have faith, the Jew first, but the Greek and Gentile also.

There are wicked men who refuse to acknowledge God, though knowing Him — men who are vain image worshippers, and who have corrupted themselves by surrendering to their unnatural, vile affections, man with man and woman for woman. Filled with wickedness, they engage in various forms of evil.

But you who sit in judgment are also condemned, for in judging your fellow men, judgment is also made upon you. You will not escape God's justice. For every evildoer, there will be punishment, the Jew first, but the Gentile also. For the righteous — the Jew first, but also the Gentile — there will be glory and peace.

Those who sinned under the Law of Moses will die for their wrongdoing. The Gentiles, who do not have right to the law, shall be judged by their acts in accord with their conscience. By such standard they will be judged to have acted right or wrong in God's eyes and be punished or rewarded on that final day.

Alas for you Jews — you have the law to guide you and you know right from wrong — even so, you have fallen short. You are thieves, adulterers, idol worshippers, and you dishonor the law.

It is important to be circumcised, but if you should break the law, then your circumcision will not save you. We can agree on that, can't we? Then, if an uncircumcised man, in following his conscience, obeys the law in principle, will he be condemned because of his lack of circumcision? The true Jew is one who follows the law in Spirit and in the heart and not one who is bound by rote or ritual.

Why then, you ask me, are we called God's chosen people? Why did Jehovah give us the law if He did not expect us to keep it? Why did Jehovah tell us to be circumcised? Do we, as Jews, have any advantage?

My answer is, of course you do. In every way there is an advantage in being a Jew. First, God delivered His laws to the Jews. If any Jew is unfaithful, Jehovah will still be faithful. God remains just, though we are unjust.

Every person sins, the Jew as well as the Gentile. Law brings only the knowledge of sin. We are justified by God's grace alone, through Jesus Christ. For it was God's intention that the means of excusing and forgiving sin would be by the crucifixion of Christ (a sacrifice). When that happened, life was given many by faith.

If life is given by faith, how can we boast that it is by Jewish

law? Do you think Jehovah, the Creator, is the God of the Jews alone? If He be God, then He is also God of the Gentiles — of both the circumcised and the uncircumcised. Through faith alone shall one be justified. This does not mean that we are using the excuse of faith to annul the commandments of God — no, God's ordinances are stronger because of it.

4: Abraham? Abraham believed Jehovah. David said that a man was blessed whose sins were forgiven. He did not say a Jewish man, a Gentile man, a circumcised man, but man. Is this blessing meant only for the circumcised? At the time Abraham demonstrated his faith, he was not circumcised, it was only later that this operation was performed upon him. So he who is the father of the circumcised is also, by faith, the father of the uncircumcised. Therefore, the Gentiles should not be excluded from our religion because of their failure to comply with God's rules for the Hebrew.

We are saved through faith; let us overcome our tribulations and persevere in our goals. Remember that Christ died for the wicked. It may be that a man might die for a loved one who was good, but Christ died for us while we were still bad. We are thus reconciled to God.

It was through one man that sin and death entered the world. Thus, sin was there before there was law, though, of course, without law there could be no account kept thereof, nor could it be charged to anyone.

God's act of grace was a magnificent gift to counterbalance the effect of Adam's wrongdoing which brought death upon generation after generation. God's gift of Jesus Christ is without comparison, for the act of grace to take place in spite of the misdeeds and sins of so many.

Thus, as mankind suffered for Adam's sins, all men may benefit by God's act of the sacrificial death of His Son. As through Adam's sin generations of mankind were condemned, so through Christ's sacrifice future generations of mankind will be saved.

Having been saved through grace, shall we continue in sin? No! When we were baptized we were joined with Jesus Christ, buried with Him, lay dead, and were resurrected to a new life. We no longer serve sin. Do God's bidding as dead men raised to life. Your actions hereafter shall be governed by God's grace, not law. The wages of sin is death; God's gift is eternal life.

7: For you who have been saved and died (and the law with you) by becoming joined with the body of Christ — you are arisen to bear God's fruit. You are freed from the obligations of the law, the commandments, the ordinances, the rules; in spirit, without a written code, shall you serve Him hereafter.

On the other hand, if it were not for the law, I would not, in many cases, know what sin is. Take, for instance, the commandment not

to covet. That commandment brought forth in me pangs of conscience. Before knowing the commandment I did not know that to covet was sinful. Thus, the law is itself holy. It was not my violation of the commandment that constituted sin, but my knowledge and consequent feelings of conscience.

I am no longer bound by the law. Now, I live by a different law, God's law of spirit, which sets one free from the law of sin and death. We who are moved by the Spirit of God are sons of God. Immortality is ours; with God on our side, who can stand against us. If God gave His own Son for us, He will surely grant us, then, all things.

My conscience is clear; I speak truthfully. My natural kinsmen are Israelites. They received Jehovah, the law, the commandments, and the promises to them personally. The Christ is, Himself, a descendant of their patriarchs. Yet not all of Abraham's heirs are true Israelites, say the scriptures. Only those who are born through God's promise are children of God. Some, but not all, of Abraham's natural descendants shall be Israelites (by becoming God's children).

According to scripture, Jacob was loved and Esau was hated by Jehovah; likewise, there will be those who are born as Jews who shall not be children of God. This does not mean that God is unjust. He, being the Creator, may show mercy in accord with His own selections. While Hosea said that God declared the Jew to be His people and the Jewish nation His chosen ones, Isaiah, on the other hand, predicted that only a remnant of the Israelites would be saved.

It appears, therefore, that the Gentiles, who made no attempt to find God's grace, received it, while God's people, the Jews, struggled vainly to obtain it. The Jews failed because they sought grace based upon deeds rather than upon faith.

10: Rest assured that my constant prayer is for salvation of the Jew. They have been zealous, hard-working, and faithful. They deserve God's salvation. Moses has said that deeds are sufficient to achieve immortality.

Those who rely upon faith are those who can go down into the abyss and bring Christ up from the dead. Righteousness is of the heart, for he who has faith and confesses shall be saved. The scriptures say that all who have faith in Jesus will be glad; the scriptures do not say Jew or Greek, there is no difference made.

Not everyone has heeded the message. Isaiah preached: "I have offered my hands to a disobedient people."

So you see, it was not God who abandoned His people. It was His people who rejected Him. Only a few of God's chosen people have achieved salvation; the rest are blind. As stated by scripture: "God gave them blind eyes and deaf ears, and it will always be."

Because the Jews faltered, salvation is now available to the

Gentiles. When the Jews observe that which the Gentile now sees, they too, will want salvation and turn to God.

Gentiles, I am your evangelist. I expect, by my service to you in this respect that my own brothers, the Jews, will observe the gift you receive and seek for themselves the same salvation. You Gentiles should remember that it was the Jewish people who brought this salvation to you. Without them, you would not have received this gift.

When the fold is filled with Gentiles, all Israel shall want to be saved.

Who knows what is on God's mind? Believe me, my brothers, accept God and dedicate your lives to Him. He can change your personality. Lay aside your pride. Be charitable, love sincerely, hate evil, and look for the good. Serve the Lord. Love your enemies and have compassion upon your neighbors. Obey your superiors for they are agencies of God. Obey the law. Pay your taxes. Repay your debts. Love your neighbors.

Love is the key to the fulfillment of the commandments.

14: The day of judgment is near. Discard your vices. There is no need to store wealth in our time. Do not judge your neighbor, but embrace him who has a weaker faith than yours.

We do not all live by the same rules. We who are of different strength may suffer different pangs of conscience, or have no conscience whatsoever for the performance of the same act or the thinking of the same thought; the very same act may constitute a sin when performed by one person, but not when done by another. So we cannot pass judgment.

Nothing in itself is impure. It is only defiled if it is blighted in the mind of he who sees it. If one observes the matter and judges that it is not defiled, then it is not defiled. But be aware of the conscience of your neighbor. Do not act in such a way as to lead him into doing that which to him is a violation of his faith.

Accept each other, even as Christ accepted us. Both Jew and Gentile are accepted, as recited by the scriptures that "Gentile and Jew would sing hymns and rejoice together in God's glory".

Since God has called me as an evangelist to the Gentiles, I go forth to bring them the Word. My ministry is carrying me into many places. I hope to see you as I make my way toward Spain, but presently I must proceed to Jerusalem. I am to deliver contributions of money and certain gifts from the Gentiles of Macedonia and Achaia to the Jewish Christians there. Pray that I do not fall into the hands of the unbelievers in Judaea.

16: Please welcome Phebe, who is to arrive there shortly, in a Christian manner. Say hello to Priscilla and Aquila and express my gratitude to them. Salutations go to Epaenetus and Mary, Andronicus, and Junia, Amplias, Urbane, and Stachys, Appelles,

Narcissus, Tryphena, Tryphosa, Persis, Rufus, and all my other friends there. Beware of those among you who dispute my teaching. Be obedient and conduct your meetings in harmony. Timothy, Lucius, Jason, Sosipater, Gaius, Erastus, and Quartus send their felicitations.

Glory unto Jesus Christ. — Written from Corinth by Phebe.

CORINTHIANS

Comment

Paul was a Pharisee, a Benjamite, the son of a Roman, and therefore a Roman citizen. In Gentile meetings, whether Greek, Roman, or Asian, his status as a Roman commanded attention. In the synagogues, his Jewish heirship likewise served him.

Apparently Paul wrote three, four, or more letters to the Church at Corinth. Two of them were included in the books of the New Testament. The others were either never found or abandoned in early Church use.

* * * * *

I CORINTHIANS

From Paul, called by God as an apostle of Christ, and his friend, Sosthenes:

To: Members of the Corinth Church;

And to: Christians everywhere.

Peace upon you. Thank God for you. Jesus Christ will keep you safe.

I am concerned. I have heard through some of Chloe's messengers that you are quarreling amongst yourselves. Some of you claim to be followers of Paul, others Apollo, while others name Cephas as their disciple, and still others profess to follow Christ. In whose name, I ask you, were you baptized?

I baptized only Crispus, Gaius, and the household of Stephanas, all in the name of Christ. Follow Christ. While the Jews search for "signs" and the Greeks espouse wisdom, let us hold forth Christ, Son of God, who died for us. Weakness or folly, if it be of God, shall prevail over man's strength and wisdom.

You are a people of God, in whom rests spiritual power through faith, and you and I are aware that there are things beyond our comprehension that God has not seen fit to reveal to us. Apollos, after all, and I, myself, are nothing more than God's messengers, evangelists who plant the seed. God gives the increase. We may have laid the foundation in you, through God, but the remainder of the structure is in your hands. You are God's Temple and His Spirit dwells within you.

We are all Christ's servants.

4: Consider Apollos and me. We are clothed in rags, travel about the countryside hungry and thirsty, work endlessly day and night. We are cursed, slandered, and humiliated, spat upon and derided. We bless those who curse us, and persevere in our mission for Christ. Can you follow our example?

I am sending Timothy to help you. I will be able to visit you soon, also. At that time, I will deal with those of you who have taken upon themselves the job of spokesmen or advisers to others.

I cannot believe the reports concerning the promiscuous fornication existing among the members of the Church. There is even a report that one man has married his father's wife. How can the members of the Church hold up their heads? Are they allowing this shameful circumstance to exist among them? Why hasn't the membership expelled the man from the Church?

I do not hesitate to judge the man. His body is doomed for destruction in Hell (on judgment day his spirit may be saved).

Purge from your Church the undesirables, the Christian evildoers. I realize that this sinful world is filled with pagans who steal, fornicate, rob, cheat, or engage in idol worship. I do not ask you to keep away from them. But you should expel from your group and from your own association those so-called Christians who are robbers, slanderers, drunkards, swindlers, idol worshippers, or who otherwise engage in careless, immoral conduct. Do not even eat or drink with them.

It is not our lot to judge those outside the Church for that task is left to God. But we are judges of those within the Church — those persons found guilty of wrongdoing should be ostracised from your company.

6: Don't take your disagreements before the courts. As we know, it will be us, God's people, that will judge the world. Aren't we, who are destined to judge angels, able to handle the disputes existing within our membership? Rather than take your case before the Gentile, it is better to suffer the wrong.

You have been sanctified by faith and baptism and all things are lawful to you, but that does not leave you without restraints. The body was not made for passion. Christ is a part of your body. Shun fornication.

It is very desirable that a man do not lay with a woman, not ever. I, myself, abstain — I wish everyone could, but I admit that not everyone is able to withhold their passion or their desire. Therefore, I grant this concession, not because it is right, but because it is an evil necessity, that each man who must may have his own wife. They must give to each other the love they owe.

I congratulate those who are unmarried and those widows who, like me, can restrain themselves.

For those who marry, this rule shall prevail: the wife shall not leave her husband, nor shall the husband divorce his wife. Do not put your spouse away, even though he or she be a heathen; but if your heathen spouse desire a separation or divorce, so be it.

Each one of us may continue to live his life according to his custom at the time of God's call. Therefore, he that is uncircumcised need not be circumcised. He that is a slave need not be freed

(he is already the Lord's free man). He that is married may remain married (unfortunately, those who marry will thereby suffer much sorrow, and my teachings are intended to spare them this pain). Anyway, the time of the end is very near. Everyone should conduct themselves as if they were unmarried, if they can.

God can best be served when you are free of anxieties. A married man is shackled with desires for worldly goods in order to please his wife, and he has little time for serving God. Likewise, the married woman's desire is to please her husband.

These things I say to you in your own behalf, not because I wish to oppress you in any way.

Regarding the eating of foods which have been offered to idols:

Those who eat this food with a sense of dedication or awareness of its religious nature, or with pangs of conscience, are acting sinfully. But for those who eat of it indifferent to its source, and without misgivings, there is no sin connected with the act. However, do not eat the meat in the presence of a brother to whom such act is sinful and an affront to his conscience. If eating meat in his presence shall make a brother offend, abstain when he is near.

9: Consider me, your apostle, who has seen Jesus. You are the products of my work.

Wouldn't I have some right to food and wine from my followers? Why can't I have a wife like Cephas and some of the other apostles? Of your leaders, only Barnabas and I work to survive. This is in addition to our evangelistic activities. If, through us, you have received spiritual sustenance, is it too much to ask that you make to us material gifts?

I have asked nothing. You are aware that the priests receive and eat the Temple offerings. Even those who only assist in the altar services share in the sacrificial meat. My only reward has been the privilege of bringing the Word of the gospel to you.

I have cast myself into many roles in order to reach souls for Christ. When with the Jews I became one of them and placed myself under the law of Moses, although I am not subject to it. When I was with the Gentiles I placed myself outside the law with them. In the company of the weak, I also became weak in order to win them. I have been all things to all men, that I might persuade them.

10: Our ancestors, led by the Cloud of Fire, passed through the Red Sea together, eating food provided by God and water from a rock (the rock was Christ). Very few of them were accepted by God — most of them perished on the desert.

Let us not arouse the wrath of Jehovah. Steer clear of idol practices. Do not eat idolatrous food. If you are not aware that the meat offered was sacrificed to idols, then you will be permitted to eat, but when the information has been given you, do not eat of it,

if not for your own conscience, at least in deference to the conscience of your brother.

Keep your faith that you might persevere through all temptation.

You have been keeping the church precepts which I gave you very well. But I wish to remind you that a man must keep his head uncovered in Church, or when he prays or prophesies; a woman, on the other hand, must cover her head on the same occasions. The reason for this is that man is the image and glory of God and it is unnecessary, therefore, for him to cover his head; while a woman, on the other hand, made not in God's image but in man's, reflects the glory of her husband. For woman was created for man and from him. It is her obligation to wear a veil and cover her head as a symbol of authority to her husband in fear and respect of God.

You be the judge. You have argued over this matter, but this is my opinion, that it is not proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered. There is no custom among the various churches that will permit her to do so.

Also, I have heard that when you meet together, you have a tendency to divide up into small groups and eat and drink in seclusion. Do not consume your food and drink beforehand. Participate together in the Lord's Supper, eating of the body and drinking of the blood as stated in the scriptures.

The gifts of the spirit are diverse and many. One man may be a gifted public speaker, another has faith, another the ability to express himself, another the gift of healing, another able to perform miracles, or prophesy, while still others may have the gift of ascertaining between evil and good spirits, or the ability to speak or understand tongues. Whether Jew or Greek, slave or free man, we are in one body (Christ's) by baptism and spirit. All of us are a part of Christ's body, whether we be apostles, prophets, teachers, miracle workers, healers, government officials, laborers, or laymen.

13: Whatever we are, if we are without compassion, we are nothing. Without compassion, our prophecies, charities, and kindness shall not profit us. Faith, hope and love are everlasting. Place love above all else, but develop your character through kindness, patience, and humility.

Now, my friends, about those who speak in tongues. Of what good is this speech unless somebody can understand it? Even inanimate objects — say, for example, musical instruments, produce sounds recognized by someone; otherwise, they are of no account. Words which no one comprehends are just so much noise.

The scriptures say that the chosen people will be spoken to by foreigners, reciting the law and will of God, but even then they will not believe. Obviously, the unknown tongue was not intended for unbelievers. How could they be informed through an unknown

language? Therefore, in your meetings, use hymns, revelations, prophecies, and, on rare occasions, sparing employment of the speaking in "tongues". Be orderly, with one speaking at a time.

Under no circumstances should women be allowed to speak during church services. Their duty is to obey, not teach. If a woman wishes to be informed as to something in particular, she can ask her husband at home. To allow a woman to speak during your meeting would be degrading and shameful.

My writings are the commandments of God. Those of you who have aspirations to prophesy or preach must acknowledge this; pay no attention to those who write or speak otherwise.

15: Let us think a moment upon the gospel which I have taught you; that Christ died for our sins, was buried, raised from the dead, appeared to Cephas, and later to the twelve disciples, and still later before 500 Jewish Christians who had gathered together at a meeting (many of whom are still living); then again, he appeared before James, and thereafter before all the apostles.

After a period of time, He appeared before me.

Since there is a record of all these appearances by Christ before us, how can any of you argue that there is no resurrection of the dead. A man (Adam) introduced death to us all; a man (Christ) brought resurrection. When the day of judgment arrives — and that day will not come until Christ has defeated the evils of the world and every authority above man — God will reign supreme. If there be no resurrection, why baptize? Why live goodly lives? Would it be better to live by the maxim, "Let us eat and drink joyfully for there is no tomorrow"?

You have asked — "In what form will we be resurrected?" The flesh of man, animals, fish and birds are not the same; Heaven and earth are different; there is a variance between the sun, the moon, and the stars. So it is with us. Our earthly body dies, alright, but it is raised in glory in the spirit as a spiritual body. The flesh comes first, and then the spiritual, as the first man made from the soil of the earth, and the second man from Heaven.

Flesh and blood shall never see God's kingdom. Remember! Those of us here on judgment day shall not die. Our bodies will change as the trumpet sounds. On that day the dead shall rise, immortal.

Persist, my brothers, that you may know immortal life.

Please continue with your collections for the worthy Jewish Christians in Jerusalem. Each Sunday, set a little of your income aside for this purpose. I will come personally, or send messengers, to receive your gift and carry it to Jerusalem. Timothy will join you soon, but briefly. I anticipate that Apollos, when he is ready, will see you in Corinth. Stephanas, Fortunatus, and Achaicus have joined me here and are a great help to me. Aquila, Priscilla, members of the Church, and the brotherhood send their love and

good will.

I write you in my own hand. Signed: Paul.

The grace of Christ be with you.

Note: The above and foregoing epistle to the Corinthians was written from Philippi by Stephanas, and Fortunatus, and Achaicus, and Timotheus.

II CORINTHIANS

1: From Paul and Timothy to the Corinthian Church group:
May grace come to you from God and Jesus Christ.

Praise God, our Comforter. How fortunate for us that as we toiled in Asia we had God to comfort us through our trials. At times our work was all uphill and our lives were often in jeopardy.

I had meant to visit you twice, going and coming from Macedonia, but it does not appear that I will be able to make it. In place of a visit, I write this letter, tearfully, misgivingly, but with love.

It appears that the penalty agreed upon by the membership for the distress which the accused caused the congregation was just. Now, you must forgive the offender. Confirm your love to him before the membership.

3: When I arrived in Troas, I could not minister because Titus was not there, so I left for Macedonia. I carried no letters of recommendation. We need none, for our message is from Christ and this can be seen upon our faces. Our abilities as ministers of the New Testament comes from God.

Moses was veiled as he received the law from God for the Israelites; even now a veil encircles the heart of the Jews when Moses is read to them. They cannot comprehend. But for us, who speak through the Lord's spirit, there is no veil. Our gospel is delivered to those minds receptive to it and who are not blinded by the law. We believe. As scriptures command, we tell others. We are not easily discouraged. We look toward the future, to the spirit, for it is eternal; that which is flesh soon passes away.

5: We yearn for the day a new, immortal body will clothe our spiritual being. Until this is done we are apart from God. When one is with Christ, he begins anew. Let us not waste the new life which has been given us. Together we are His messengers; we will be known by our actions rather than by our words.

We are honorable men. We speak truthfully. Heed our advice:

Don't marry unbelievers. Could Christ agree with the Devil? Can the Temple of God be reconciled with the heathen's idols? Is there a difference between night and day? Shall ye who are righteous, then, consort with those who are wicked?

Recently, I have despaired to see, everywhere I go, dissent among the people. Titus' report, when he joined me here, of your partisanship in my behalf brought heartwarming joy. I was sorry that I sent you the letter before. I did not wish to cause you pain, but now that I have reflected upon it and learned that it has led to your becoming stronger in faith and body, I am glad that I did.

I want you to know, it was not the accused, the victim, nor even the offense which brought about my anxiety, but rather my concern for your welfare. Your response to my expressed anxiety has cheered me. The presence of Titus, happy and proud, restores

my confidence.

8: The members of the Church here in Macedonia have tithed unselfishly, going beyond what they could afford. I am sure that you, too, will want to be equally generous with your contributions. Continue your work. Share your wealth with others less fortunate. Someday they will share with you — we shall share all our property equally.

We are sending Titus, with some of the Church members here, back to you that you may demonstrate your willingness to help your fellowman. Prove to them that our words of praise of you have not been vainly spoken. It would be a shame if you did not meet the challenge. Each person should give freely without holding back, remembering that one reaps what one sows. Your generosity will reflect to God's glory, proving your love for God and your love for your fellowman. Give thanks to God.

10: I, Paul, speak to you by the authority of Christ. My letters reflect strength; my personal presence speaks as boldly and forthrightly. I and my friends do not indulge in vain boasting. Our boasting is of the Lord.

Continue to listen to me. It was I that introduced you to Christ. I am constantly concerned that you may stray, that someone may come by who proclaims another savior, or preaches a different spirit, or introduces you to a different belief, and that you will accept it and fall short of the truth. I have not been a burden to you (my friends in Macedonia have supported me while I was here), and I shall continue to bring you the gospel and tell you of the Spirit.

Be alert! Fakirs will come, and many will pretend to be Christ's followers or ministers. Even Satan has heretofore appeared proclaiming to be an angel of Light. The time of these charlatans is short. They will receive their just desserts.

Allow me to boast a little. Are these pretenders Hebrews? So am I. Or Israelites, or descendants of Abraham, or Christ's servants? So, also, am I. Beaten, imprisoned, scourged, stoned, shipwrecked, starved and thirsted, I have continued in my way, toiling endlessly in your behalf.

I live and die for our people and our followers.

12: I, too, have received visions from God. I am acquainted with a Christian man who, in past years, was taken by God as far as the third heaven and in Paradise was given God's secrets. These secrets I will not publish. To prevent my rapture, Satan's messengers were allowed to bruise me on three occasions during the time I was receiving God's revelations.

Now, I am going to visit you again. I have not lived on your charity in the past and I do not intend to ask you for anything now. I love you. I come to help you. I trust that you will not be

quarreling, that the strife will be stilled, and the anger, jealousy, gossip, and dissent will be missing.

This is my third visit. I will judge those who have sinned. No evidence will be received unless it is sustained by the testimony of two or three witnesses. This time, I will not spare you.

Ask yourselves, are you living as righteous men, as followers of Christ? My prayer is that all is well.

Goodbye. Love one another and live peacefully together. May the grace of Jesus Christ be with you.

Note: The second epistle to the Corinthians was written from Philippi, a city of Macedonia, by Titus and Lucas.

GALATIANS

1: From Paul, appointed an apostle, not by man, but directly from God through Jesus Christ: Blessings upon you Galatians from God and Christ.

I have heard, and am amazed to learn, that you have turned from Christ and are now following a different teaching. Believe me, if any man should teach a belief different from the gospel we first taught you, he will be accursed. You can see that I speak frankly and not in appeasement.

Our credo is not a contrivance of man, for it came to me by the revelation of Jesus Christ.

You will remember my vengeance in persecuting the followers of Christ when I was an Orthodox Jew; then God selected me and sent His Son to direct me to teach among the heathen. As Jehovah ordered so I acted, taking His message to the Arabians and, thereafter, to the Syrians in Damascus.

Three years went by, and when I finally visited Jerusalem, I became acquainted first with Peter, Christ's disciple, and then later, James.

I am telling the truth. I am not lying. You can believe me.

2: I continued to preach in Syria and Cilicia. The Church membership in Judaea heard of my activities and praised me often. Fourteen years passed and, upon God's orders, I finally visited Jerusalem again, this time, with Barnabas and Titus.

I explained to the Jerusalem Christians my ministry to the Gentiles. Some of them wanted to place us in chains, but I stood my ground, and Titus, although a Greek, stood up to them also, refusing to undergo the rite of circumcision. So it was decided that I, Paul, had a mission with the Gentiles the same as Peter had a mission with the Jews.

Later, however, it was necessary that I confront Cephas (Peter) in Antioch because he refused to minister unto the Gentiles. Under the influence of James and certain other Jewish Christians (even Barnabas), he withdrew from the Gentile circle and advocated that the gospel was limited to the Jews.

I rebuked Cephas before the whole membership, pointing out that as he lived like a Gentile, it was not for him to insist that a Gentile must conform to the Jewish ways. We, Jews by nature, have placed our faith in Jesus Christ. By that faith we are justified, not by law. I said to him:

"I have been crucified with Christ. Faith alone sustains me now. I believe that the Son of God sacrificed Himself for me. If righteousness comes by law, Christ died in vain."

3: You Galatians are blind. Didn't you receive the Spirit by believing? (Or by the law?) Have you suffered so much to achieve so little? Will it be the material which redeems you? The scriptures

say that God told Abraham that all nations will be blessed through him. Obviously, this includes all Gentiles who share the faith with the faithful Abraham.

Christ saved us from the curse of the law. Remember the covenant that God made with Abraham and his issue. The law was to be set aside when the issue (Christ) was born. The law doesn't conflict with God's promises; it was only to teach us until supplanted by Christ's coming and consequent faith in Him. And so, the law is ended.

Now, we are all one person in Jesus Christ, the issue of Abraham and the heirs of God by the covenant given to Abraham.

Let us review our association. In the beginning, I remember well your gracious welcome, even though the sight of my poor, ugly body must have been repulsive to you. You followed my teaching and were happy. Would you change all that?

What does the law say? Abraham had two sons, one by his slave by nature and the other of his wife by God's promise. One stands for Mt. Sinai (Agar) representing the Jerusalem bound in slavery in Arabia, and the other represents the heavenly Jerusalem. The scriptures say that the son of the slave woman shall not be an heir with the free woman's son. We are descendants of the free woman. Christ set us free.

5: Circumcision will be of no benefit to you. You cannot be justified by law, for, relying on law, you abandon Christ and fall from grace. If we are joined with Him, circumcision is immaterial.

Your progress has been so good. Who is misleading you? You may be assured that he must some day face the wrath of God for his wrongful teaching. I'm sure that you ultimately will see the right way. These meddlers who teach that circumcision is a necessity should themselves be castrated.

Love one another. Live by the Spirit and the rivalries between you will disappear. He who is guided by the Spirit will not be a party to fornication, lust, adultery, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, wrath, envy, strife, murder, seditions, heresies, and drunkenness. His reward will be love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, and faith. Every man should be humble, reluctant to judge others, and law-abiding.

You can see that I am writing in my own handwriting. Remember, circumcision is immaterial to justification. You are saved by faith, experiencing a new birth. Those that insist that you undergo the operation as a condition of salvation are ignorant sticklers for hypocritic ritual.

In the name of Jesus, whose mark is upon me, bless you and your spirit.

PAUL'S LETTER TO THE EPHESIANS

Comment

Ephesians: Identified as Paul's at a very early date by Irenaeus, Clement, and even Marcion, the heretic. Written about 61 A.D. Contention is made that additions to the book were made later by others.

* * * * *

From Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the faithful:

1: Peace. Blessed be our Father and His Son, Jesus Christ.

God selected us before the beginning of the world. It was His plan that we would be loved by Him and accepted as His children through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, His Son. He has disclosed to us His will, that we and the whole world will be united with Christ. I thank God that this is so and that you are joined with me in Christ. In my prayers, I ask that God lead you in Spirit and truth, that you may share in His glory.

I relish the memory of your having departed the ways of sin and evil and entered upon the way of the Spirit. For God, in His mercy, redeemed us from the death which was our due and united us in life with Christ. It is by grace that you are saved, through believing in Him, and not through any acts of our own.

Can you remember the time when you, Gentiles by birth and called the uncircumcised by the Jew, were without Christ and an outcast to God altogether since you were not a part of the commonwealth of Israel, nor under the law and within the promises that God gave His chosen people?

Without a God, you were without hope. For you, as Gentiles, there was no tomorrow. But now it is different. Through Christ Jesus and His sacrifice, the Gentile has been placed on an equal footing with the Jew. It was He, Christ Jesus, who canceled the law by virtue of His crucifixion, so that Jew and Gentile became one, bringing peace to all.

Through Him, all of us have access to the Father. The Jew, the Gentile, the universe — are united in the body of Christ under God. God has explained to me through revelation and vision that the Gentiles are fellow heirs with the Jews, sharing the promise of Jesus Christ. Though undeserving, I am, through God's command, the evangelist to the Gentiles. It is in this Spirit that I pray in your behalf.

4: There is one body, one Spirit, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God. As God ascended to the heights, as scripture notes, so also, therefore, must He have descended into the abyss. He is everywhere.

He appoints prophets, ministers, teachers, and evangelists, as He deems just and fitting. These shall lead you, to help you grow

in Christ, joined to Him, a part of His body. Give up the life of the heathen and begin anew. Speak truthfully, with calm temperament, be honest and hardworking; do not curse, steal, or lie. Be kind, tenderhearted, forgiving and love one another. Forsake fornication, greed, lust, or ribald joking; live in the Light; sing and praise God.

You wives shall be subservient to your husband (for as Christ is head of the Church, so also is the husband the head of the wife). Men, love your wives as you would your own body. Obey your parents and be firm, but not grim, with your children. A slave shall be obedient and respectful to his master. The master shall be considerate of his slave.

Persevere and keep the faith. Our fight is against the rulers of darkness and spiritual wickedness. Remember me in your prayers. I send Tychicus to help you. Peace and love to all of you from God and Christ.

PHILIPPIANS

54-64 A.D.

From Paul and Timothy: To all the saints at Philippi, with their bishops and deacons.

Peace. My thanks for your work in God's behalf is expressed in my prayers. Whenever I am called, either from jail or in court to speak in behalf of the gospel, I am reminded of your help from the first days.

My imprisonment in the cause of Christ has become a matter of public interest and, as a result, the gospel of Christ is being brought to the attention of the people. I rejoice that this news is reaching them.

For myself, it would be better that death would come, that my spirit would then be joined with Christ. Yet, my work is unfinished, and my mission requires that I continue to live as flesh and blood here among you.

Let us stand together, knowing that if we suffer for Christ, our rewards will be all the greater. Do not be jealous of each other, but look after each other as brothers, and with love for one another. Let me rejoice, upon judgment day, that you are the product of my labor.

I think Timothy will be able to visit with you soon, and perhaps, a little later, I will also be able to come. Epaphroditus, one of your members who has been here with me to help me in my time of need, has become very homesick, and so is returning to you shortly. He has been very sick, but he has now recovered and he needs your welcome and prayers.

Goodbye, dear friends.

3: I'm going to repeat what I have often told you. Watch out for those scoundrels and fakirs who run about the country teaching circumcision. I take no stock in this knife-slashing of the body. I, myself, was circumcised on the eighth day, am of Israelite stock, a Benjamite, a Hebrew by birth and upbringing, and a zealous Pharisee.

But I say these virtues were for naught. It is my faith in Christ and my union with Him in body and spirit on which I rely. It is this faith in Him, and only through Him, that I may be resurrected and live again. I realize that I have not fully reached my goal in being one with Christ, to know that I will receive the resurrection, but I continue to strive to make myself more perfect that I might attain it.

Our cause has many enemies who revel in lust and think only of the material. We can look to Heaven for our deliverance; we will stand firm.

Euodias! Syntyche! I plead that you resolve your differences and worship God together. Join with Clement, my friends, and the women there who assisted me in my efforts, and all my fellow

workers. Contemplate, with love, all that is pure and clean.

Your concern for me has warmed my heart throughout my trials. I am confident that I can sustain myself, through hunger and thirst, in good times or bad, but it is good to know that you are with me. You have always been generous. Even in Thessalonica you sent gifts to me twice and now, through your brother, Epaphroditus, you have sent a gift to me again. It is a fragrant offering, a sacrifice pleasing to God. God will reward you for your kindness.

Give my greetings to your brothers who worship with you. May Christ's grace be with you.

It was written to the Philippians from Rome by Epaphroditus.

COLOSSIANS

From Paul, Christ's apostle, and Timothy.

To: Our brothers in Christ at Colosse. Peace to all of you.

Thank God for you. Epaphras has told us of your work in behalf of the gospel. In you lies the seed of his teaching and he is very proud of you. May you continue to grow to the glory of God.

God saved us from death so that we may enjoy the kingdom of Christ. In Christ, who existed before creation, Jehovah created all things in heaven and earth. The whole universe has been created by Christ for Christ, and is Christ.

Christ is the head of the body, the Church. He is the beginning of the Church, the first to return from the dead, to be exalted over all things. It was through Christ that God chose to bring peace to the world. Through him the world becomes one.

It is through Christ that you, yourselves, were saved. It was Christ's death, the sacrifice of His blood, that brings you to Jehovah, wholly cleansed and without sin. This is the basic principle of our sect. I have been chosen to be its advocate.

It is Christ alone we honor. Be a part of Him. Meditate upon His goodness. Without Christ there is no God-head. In Him you are complete, a circumcised (not physically, but in Spirit) being. In Him you are baptized, buried with Him, and resurrected. Through Him, God has forgiven you your sins and given you life again. No longer are you under the law, for it, too, was a part of the cross borne by Jesus.

Pay no attention to those who criticize what you eat or drink, or bicker about your activities upon Holy days or the Sabbath. Heed not those angel worshippers who claim to be governed by visions and revelations and who insist upon ceremony and tradition. They do not understand.

For in being saved, did you not die with Christ, and in so doing pass into a spiritual world? Why, then, are you bound by custom, tradition, or man's rules any longer? However wise the rules may be, they are still only of human origin.

If you were resurrected with Christ, live on that plain, and think not of earthly things. Be beyond the sins of sex, lust, envy, greed, anger, cursing, and dishonesty. You have a new image and a new outlook.

Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, Barbarian, Scythian, slave and free man, all, in being justified, acquire a new image in Christ. The saved shall be merciful, kind, humble, and forgiving. Above all else, they shall know love.

Wives in Christ shall obey their husbands, and husbands shall love their wives. Children shall be obedient to their parents, and fathers shall treat their children firmly, but with forbearance so as not to discourage them. Slaves shall obey their master and be sincere in service. Those who have servants should be just in

dealing with them. After all, we will expect justice from our Master in Heaven.

Pray thankfully. Be tactful in dealing with those outside the Church. Do not argue.

Tychicus is bringing you this letter. Onesimus will be with him. Aristarchus, Marcus (Mark, Barnabas' nephew), and Jesus Justus send their best wishes. Actually, Marcus and Jesus Justus are the only ones of the Jewish Christians who have been willing to help me in my work.

Epaphras, who is working constantly for you, the people at Laodicea, and the faithful at Hierapolis, pray for you.

Luke, the doctor, and Demas send their regards. Please forward this letter, after you have read the same, to the Laodicea congregation and to Nymphas so that he may read the letter to those who meet at his home. You should be able to obtain the other letter I sent the membership at Laodicea when they have finished with it. Tell Archippus to attend the duties which he has been assigned.

I write this in my own hand — Paul. I am still in prison. God be with you.

Written from Rome to the Colossians by Tychicus and Onesimus.

THESSALONIANS

Comment

Letter, about 50 A.D., addressed to the Gentile converts.

* * * * *

I THESSALONIANS

From Paul, Silvanus, and Timotheus, to the children of God at Thessalonica.

Peace to you. We pray for you regularly. We are aware of your continued work in behalf of Christ. You have been chosen by God. It is you of whom we speak proudly when we visit the membership in Macedonia and Achaia.

Do you remember when we first came to you? We spoke the gospel message boldly, even though we had just come from Philippi where we had been abused and humiliated. Although unflattering in the delivery of our message, we were kindly, too, and considerate of each of you in bringing you into God's company.

We realize that since your conversion, you have been punished and persecuted by your fellow man. You are not alone. The Christians in Judaea are constantly harassed by the Jews. We, ourselves, are persecuted by the Jewish Christians. They have attempted and are attempting to prevent us from preaching God's message to the Gentiles.

When we could not come to visit you directly, we sent Timotheus. Timotheus has now returned to Athens and has proudly described your persevering faith. How happy we are, for you and for ourselves! May God amplify your love and strengthen your faith and your purpose.

Remember, you must keep all the commandments we delivered to you, and not just some of them. Avoid fornication, as God desires that we be pure. Love one another. Work that you may sustain yourself and be self-reliant. Do not lose faith in the resurrection — as Jesus died and rose again, so also will your brothers now sleeping.

On the judgment day, the trumpet will speak, the archangel will sing, and God will descend from Heaven. At that time, the dead who are believers shall rise from their graves, and we living shall join them. We shall go into the clouds to meet God, to live with Him forever.

We know not when, for His coming will be as the thief comes in the night or the sudden birth pains of woman with child. Be prepared.

Our brothers, live in peace and love one another; be charitable to

all. Pray for us, as we pray for you, and be thankful always for our Lord. May the grace of Christ be yours. Read this letter at the meetings.

II THESSALONIANS

To the Church of the Thessalonians, from Paul, Silvanus, and Timotheus.

Grace and peace to you from God and Christ.

We thank God for you and rejoice in the strengthening of your faith. We have continued to observe your progress, which has been most pleasing. May the name of Lord Jesus be glorified in you.

Rest assured, the Lord will not forget your fidelity through trial and trouble. When Jesus comes in clouds of fire, flanked by angels, your tormenters shall perish and be cast into hell.

You shall be with Him.

Do not pay any attention to the rumors representing knowledge of the day of judgment. *Do not* listen to them. The Day of Christ will not be here until the final battle against God. Before that day comes, Satan will arrive in human form. He will pretend to be a god himself and occupy a place in God's Temple. He will be aided by powerful works, signs, and lies. Many will be misled; the fires of Hell shall be their reward for their lack of discernment.

Be resolute and keep the rules which we have left you. Demonstrate your love and your faith that you might glorify Christ. Pray for us, also, and trust in God.

Stay away from a brother who is lazy. Follow our example. Stay busy and toil for your daily bread, for, as Christ taught, he who will not work should not eat. Do not associate with those who lag or are unwilling to shoulder their share of the load. Warn them, in a kindly manner, of their transgression.

This handwriting, PAUL, is mine, so that you may know that the letter is from me and genuine in all respects. May Christ be with you.

TIMOTHY

Comment

64 A.D., or later if the work is a forgery.

The proposition that Paul is the author of this work has been contested since the 2nd Century. Maybe the body of the letter supplied the framework into which the forged material was inserted by overzealous followers. Perhaps the suspicious source of the Gospel was investigated at an early date and the authorship exonerated by ample documentation.

* * * * *

PAUL'S FIRST LETTER TO TIMOTHY

From Paul to Timothy.

Grace and peace to you from God and Jesus Christ.

Some time ago I encouraged you to remain at Ephesus. I had hoped that you would be able to correct the false teaching of certain persons who mingled among our brethren speaking fables and superstition. Some of our followers have become lost among the customs, traditions, commandments, and ordinances, and they set themselves up as teachers, delivering to others bold explanations of our creed and law which they, themselves, do not understand.

After all, in reading the law, we should be able to use a little common sense. For the law is certainly not made for those who are law-abiding, but for the rebellious, sinful, liars, murderers, whoremongers, and criminals. I thank God for giving me the ability to understand our creed.

I was a sinner and God saved me through Christ that I might live in faith and glorify Him. I charge you, too, Timothy, that you keep the faith and renew the battle. Some have failed, like Hymenaeus and Alexander (I have sent Hymenaeus and Alexander unto Satan that they may be punished — perhaps it will teach them a lesson).

You must pray for peace for all men, great and small. Between God and man there is only one intercessor, the man Christ Jesus. I am not lying when I tell you that I, myself, was appointed apostle in order that I might be an evangelist to the Gentiles.

Man must purify his mind by meeting and praying with other men. Their wives and women, subtly dressed, must be still at the meetings, attending only with their ears. A woman shall not teach. Do not forget that Adam, first created, was led into sin by the woman, Eve.

Thirst for leadership is honorable. Our Bishop, then, must be ambitious, true, married only once, and patient, courteous and calm; he must have business acumen, be of frugal taste and revered by his family. He should have experienced many years of

Christian activity and be held in high esteem among the pagans as well as the Christians.

So, also, must Deacons be scrupulous, sober, considerate men, for whom family and friends have a high regard.

Someday, according to the Spirit, false leaders who lie and who, themselves, are doomed to Hell shall seduce some of the believers with doctrine and creed conceived of Satan and his demons. Such men advocate that marriage be prohibited and that certain meats shall not be eaten (although God, having created them as food obviously intended that man should enjoy them). Tell the members of the churches what I have told you here; turn your back upon the rumors and wild tales. Place your trust in the Living God.

Teach this dogma to others. Read the scriptures. Use the spiritual gifts with which you have been blessed. Be respectful toward the elders of the congregation and considerate of the men, women and children of the church as if they were part of your family.

Provide for those widows who are deserving. You shall not maintain the younger widows or those who have been married more than once, or are indifferent, careless or greedy. It will be better that the young widows remarry; otherwise, they will become trouble makers.

The elders should receive something extra from the common till to compensate them for their work. They shall not be charged of any offense before the Church, unless there are two or three witnesses in support thereof.

By the way, Timothy, take a little wine with your meals; it will be soothing to your stomach. You won't be sick so often.

Slaves shall respect their owners, even Christian masters, serving with faith and love to the glory of Christ.

Teach these things and avoid those who would quarrel with your views. Some of these stubborn but ignorant busy-bodies would quibble, slander, and argue endlessly if you give them the opportunity. These are the people that think religion should return something tangible. The love of money is the root of all evil.

Be faithful. Having confessed your sins, as did Jesus Christ before Pontius Pilate, I command you to follow your instructions to the letter until Jesus Christ comes.

Tell others not to put their stock upon material things but to be rich in good works, with charity and good will toward all men, that they may have the life hereafter.

Blessed be Jehovah, King of kings, and Lord of lords. No man has seen Him.

Be steadfast, Tim, and heed not the vain babblings concerning our religion. For many have erred in their understanding.

Mercy.

Paul.

Laodicea, Phrygia Pacatiana.

PAUL'S SECOND LETTER TO TIMOTHY

From Paul, evangelist, to Timothy, my dear son. May God and Christ be merciful unto you.

I never cease to thank God for you, rejoicing in your strong faith. I recall having seen the same strength of faith often demonstrated by Lois your grandmother and Eunice your mother.

I urge you to be about God's business, going forth without shame or embarrassment, but with confidence and hope, recognizing always that it was through our Savior, Jesus Christ, that life everlasting is ours.

The responsibility has fallen upon me to broadcast this truth. I have taken the message to others proudly and without shame even though, at times, I have been alone. No one seems to care about me now. Only Onesiphorus has shown any attention to me here in Rome where I am imprisoned. I do not even see or hear from Hermogenes or Phygellus anymore.

Bear the burdens which become your lot, my son, and continue your teachings in behalf of Christ. Carry the message that Jesus rose from the dead, and that His chosen ones will become immortal. Speak forthrightly and do not fear that you will be criticized. Avoid the misinterpreters of our creed, the debaters of resurrection and the arguments on genealogies.

You know that Hymenaeus and Philetus are going about the countryside teaching that we are already resurrected. They are interfering with what we have taught, and this has caused some people to abandon their faith. Don't pay any attention to them. Stand firm in the foundation that God has laid for you. Pursue love and honesty with steadfast purpose. Forget the wishful thinkings taught by others; avoid contentions and debate and be gentle in the delivery of your message.

Scripture tells us that Jannes and Jambres rebelled against Moses. In the same way, these false teachers of today refuse to accept the truth. They follow an illogical path and will enjoy no permanent success in their teaching.

I am thankful for the strong bond of companionship we have experienced in our efforts at teaching faith, love, and the gospel to our brothers. We have been persecuted in many places, including Antioch, Iconium, and Lystra, and we have met the test. Remember what you have learned, and lead others in a righteous path. Sing out the message on all occasions.

My own life is about over. I have fought a good fight. I have kept the faith. God will reward me.

Come to see me soon. Demas has decided that a life filled with material blessings is better than religious temperance and absconded to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia and Titus to Dalmatia. Tychicus is in Ephesus. Luke is still here. Bring

Mark when you come.

Alexander the copper-smith will receive God's vengeance for the way he has dealt with me. Be leery of him if you should see him, because he is against everything we stand for.

When I was called into court, I was alone; none of my so-called friends came. But I had faith in the Lord that He would save me, and I was delivered from the mouth of the Lion. Praise God.

Say hello to Prisca and Aquila and, of course, Onesiphorus' family. Erastus is at Corinth; Trophimus is still at Miletum, sick.

Eubulus, Pudens, Linus, and Claudia send salutations. Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

This epistle to Timothy, first bishop of the Ephesus Church, was written from Rome when Paul was brought before Nero the second time.

PAUL'S LETTER TO TITUS

From Paul, to Titus, my son in faith, peace:

I hoped, when we left you in Crete, that you would be able to finish what we had begun regarding the organization of the Church membership.

In choosing elders, you must decide whether the man under consideration is a man of good reputation, a monogamist true to his wife (also a believer), and firm with his children, guiding them in the correct interpretation of the faith. The bishops elected must have even higher credentials. They should be persons of mild and even temperament, believers in the faith that we teach and without vulgar passions for food, drink or sex.

Too many of our followers, the Jewish converts, particularly, have gone off on a tangent. It is difficult to recognize their doctrines as a part of our religion anymore. We must curtail the activities of such men and keep them from gaining a position of leadership within the Church.

It seems true what has been said, that Cretans are, by nature, liars, wicked, and lazy, and, therefore, you must choose leaders from them who will hold them to short-rein. Then they will follow the faith that we teach instead of the Jewish fables and erroneous theories being mouthed by some of the others.

Encourage integrity of the elders; caution them to exercise sound, sober, calm judgments. The older women should, by example, lead the younger women in chastity, reverence, and humility, always obedient to their husband's command. The young men should be taught cleanliness in speech, mind, and body. Lead them by exemplary conduct.

God's gift of life has come to all men. To receive it, we are to control ourselves, maintaining body and mind. We will be prepared when Jesus Christ comes.

Obeys your rulers, work hard, and cultivate patience and understanding within you. Slaves should obey their masters, serving honestly and absolutely their owner, to the glory of God.

Once we, too, were possessed of lustful and evil tendencies. By baptism and the Holy Spirit through Jesus Christ, our life was changed.

Occupy yourselves in works which are respected by the community, and avoid quarrels and debates regarding the law. You may speak to the unbeliever twice — that is enough — for if he is foolish enough to continue his disbelief, forget him and go your way. He condemns himself by his own twisted views.

I will send Artemus or Tychicus for you when it is time to go to Nicopolis for the winter. Help Zenas the lawyer and Apollos when you see them. I repeat, commit your people to engage in honorable work that they will be fruitful.

God bless you all.

Written to Titus, first bishop of Crete, from Nicopolis of Macedonia.

PAUL'S LETTER TO PHILEMON

From Paul and Timothy to our comrade, Philemon, and beloved Apphia, Archippus, and all the members that attend the meetings at your home.

Grace unto you from God and Christ. When I pray I name you in my prayers, thanking God for you, your steadfast faith and love. I pray always that our experience together will grow and will become enriched through our union with Christ.

From this prison, I am sending Onesimus, though I will miss him, in anticipation that you will consent and receive him joyfully. Forget what he has done to you in the past. If he has wronged you, or owes you, charge that to my account. Receive him now, not as a slave, but as a brother, for he has been of much help to me and to Christ. I sign this PAUL so you will know that it is from me.

Epaphras, Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, and Lucas send greetings. The grace of Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

HEBREWS

Comment

Students of the gospel are divided in opinion as to the name of the writer of Hebrews. Some say Paul. Some choose Apollo, an Alexandrian Jew. Numerous others are named. The arguments prompted this remark from Origen, Christian Patriarch, in the 3rd Century:

“God only knows who wrote the Epistle to the Hebrews.”

Written somewhere between 60 and 96 A.D., it was accepted as Paul's work by the Council of Trent in the 16th Century.

* * * * *

1: In the ages of old, Jehovah spoke to our ancestors through the prophets. In these last days, God speaks to us through the Son, who sits at the right hand of God in the image and power of God, Himself.

Jehovah's Son is above the angels, as scriptures say, for the angels, after all, are nothing more than spirits sent out by God to perform ministerial acts, while Christ was set upon a throne to rule. Since Christ is greater, as say the scriptures, than all the angels, it behooves us to pay attention to what He says. Surely, we shall be punished if we fail to accept the salvation made available by Christ Himself, and later attested to by signs and miracles by God Himself.

It is true that for a short time Jesus, a God, appeared to us in human form, placing Himself below God and the angels, but when He suffered death and was resurrected, He resumed His place at God's right hand. Because Christ appeared to us in human form, we are His brothers, as He says. Since Christ suffered as much or more than we have, He will be all the more understanding in His role as Mediator between God and man. He is our High Priest.

4: Who shall enter God's house? Those of Moses' followers who rebelled and would not believe perished upon the desert. Of God's chosen people, to whom the gospel was first given, there remains mostly unbelievers. So, for the most part, they shall not enter. Only we believers, through our High Priest in Heaven (Jesus, God's Son), may approach God's throne.

As the Jewish High Priests, while chosen from among men, were called by God, so it was with Christ whom God appointed, according to the scriptures, saying, “Thou art a priest forever, after the order of Melchizedek”. It isn't easy to explain our religion concerning Melchizedek. It is easy enough to talk about ritual, baptism, laying on of hands, resurrection and final judgment, but to teach the priesthood and the finer points of our religion is another matter.

For example, how can it be explained that men who, having had

the experience of union with Christ, having known God's word, and having felt the Spirit, could backslide again? (I am not accusing you. God knows how faithful you have been.)

God promised Abraham, under oath, that he would have many descendants. The promise was fulfilled. As men swear under oath, calling upon a power greater than themselves to ensure their performance, how much greater is God's promise when He guarantees it by oath. Jehovah cannot lie.

7: Our hope is in Jesus, our mediator, our High Priest after the order of Melchizedek. Melchizedek, you will recall, was the King of Salem and the Priest of the most high God, who met with Abraham when Abraham was returning in victory from his battle with kings. Abraham tithed to him a part of everything he had won. Melchizedek means "King of Righteousness and Peace". Melchizedek has no father, no mother, and he was never born and will never die and will be a priest forever.

If it had been possible that one of the Levites could have become perfect, it would not have been necessary for the scriptures to speak of a coming priest after the order of Melchizedek. For Christ descended from the tribe of Judah and not the priestly tribe of the Levites.

What I am saying is that the Jewish people paid homage to the descendants of Levi, who were descendants of Abraham. Abraham, however, tithed to Melchizedek, who always was, and who, therefore, was not one of his descendants. Melchizedek was, then, a priest outside the tribe of Levi and outside the Jewish priesthood and, therefore, not bound by Jewish tradition.

Therefore, the new priest, the Savior, like Melchizedek, not of the Jewish priesthood, is not tied to old ritual or rule, but spirit and life. The priesthood of Jesus is forever, guaranteed by God under oath. He came, as High Priest, at the end of a time, sinless and without blemish.

Since He, Himself, is here forever, no other High Priest will ever be needed. He was sacrificed to redeem the people; there is no further need for sacrifices on the altar. Jesus, having been appointed High Priest through God's oath, is above and separate from the law to which ordinary priests are bound.

There was a time when man was redeemed through the law God gave to Moses on the mountain. These laws required the making of sacrifices, following God's instructions in ritual to the minutest detail, and obeying innumerable rules and processes. This method of redemption turned out to be inadequate. Then God promised, through the prophets, a New Covenant with Israel and Judah to the effect that they would be God's chosen people, with

the law etched upon their hearts. That, too, has been replaced.

The old rules involving the tent, the candlestick, the shewbread, the sanctuary, the Most Holy Place, the golden Ark, and slaughtered animals must be considered as having been superceded when God sent Christ, His High Priest, and sacrificed Him for all mankind. (How superior is the sacrifice of the blood of God's Son over the blood of sheep and cows!)

And so, Christ is the intercessor between man and God, a tenet of the New Covenant with God. It was a covenant made in blood, vesting by virtue of the death of the Son of God. The old covenant had also vested through bloody sacrifice — remember how Moses sprinkled the blood of sacrificial calves upon the Book of the Law, upon the altar, and among the people.

In fact, according to God's commandments, there is no remission of sin without the shedding of blood.

Christ was given only once, and that was enough, in blood to suffer for the sins of the world. So much better is this than the law, which provided that sacrifices should be given time after time, year after year, perpetually. It is doubtful that the blood of bulls could blot out sin anyway. Jesus' single offering conforms to the scripture which says that the Lord place "His laws in the hearts of men" and "forgive and forget" their sins. Therefore, Christ need not sacrifice Himself annually.

The curtain before the Holy of Holies has been removed. Let us meet together (before and with Him) to share God's promise, renew our faith, and learn to love others.

There will be no more sacrifices. If we continue to sin after the truth has been given us, we can expect no redemption from the fires of Hell. It used to be that when a man violated Moses' law and there was evidence by two or three witnesses that he did so, he was executed. For that man who turns his back upon Christ after having been told the good news, a punishment far more severe awaits him.

I know that you have experienced persecution, embarrassment, and harassment. Hold fast; your trials will soon be ended. He will come. It won't be long now.

11: It is faith that gives strength to our anticipations. By it, we know that God was the creator of all things. Through faith, Abel gave to God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain's — Enoch ascended into Heaven — Noah built his ark — Abraham left his home and founded a nation — Sarah conceived — Abraham proposed to murder his son — Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau — Joseph brought his family from famine into Egypt — God's people escaped Egypt and crossed the Red Sea — Jericho's walls collapsed — and David and Samuel conquered Canaan and established a government.

Others have, through faith, defeated wild animals, endured

tortures, even died to rise again. We must disregard every distraction and hold ourselves to a single purpose, maintaining and increasing our faith in Jesus Christ.

You are sons of God and, from time to time, you shall suffer the Father's chastisement. Accept His punishment and the ordeals to which He subjects you. Keep at peace within yourselves and with your brother.

You have come unto Mount Zion in Jerusalem, City of Heaven, City of the Living God, in full view of a host of angels, and the spirits of those already redeemed. You are in the presence of God, who will judge you, and Jesus, the mediator between God and man. Listen and do not turn away. In the scriptures, He promised that only once more would He shake the earth and heavens. Praise God for His power.

Love your Christian brothers. Some of you, unknowingly, have already shared your home with angels. Be charitable toward those in bondage. Realize that marriage is honorable; whoremongers and adulterers will feel the wrath of God.

Be content. Obey your superiors. Retain a calm, commonsense view of your religion and don't go off on some tangent following some wild theory. Be not too concerned over what foods you should eat; your sustenance will come from God. Through Jesus, continue to praise God. May God make you perfect through Jesus Christ.

Timothy has been set free. It looks like he will be with me when I come to see you. We of Italy greet you. Grace be with you.

Written to the Hebrews from Italy by Timothy.

JAMES

Comment

The author? Perhaps James, brother of Jesus. Perhaps James, son of Alphaeus. Probably not the disciple James, son of Zebedee, who was killed about 44 A.D. Date of book estimates range from 44 to 95 A.D.

* * * * *

From James, God's servant, follower of Jesus Christ.

Greetings to the Twelve Tribes scattered everywhere.

My brothers, rejoice in adversity that your faith may be strengthened. For those who overcome, there is the gift of eternal life which God has promised. God Himself sends no temptations; His gifts are perfect. He never changes.

As followers of Christ, you should always listen quietly, being ever alert to control your anger. Do not pander to the rich man and be indifferent to the poor. It is more likely to be the rich man who is contemptuous of your cause and summons you into court to answer for your actions.

Demonstrate your faith. Give and share with the poor. If faith is not demonstrated, there is no faith, for man is not justified by faith alone. You say you have faith that there is only one God. That's fine, but devils also have such belief.

Abraham demonstrated his faith by bringing his son, Isaac, to the altar for slaughter, not just in believing. The prostitute, Rahab, obtained justification in hiding and guiding the messengers, not in what she believed. Obviously, faith without works is as useless as a body without spirit.

Only a few of you will have the ability to teach, and teaching, therefore, should not be attempted by everyone. All of us have shortcomings, some more than others, and all are not equipped to lead. Think of the responsibility in what you do. A large ship is guided by a small rudder, the horse's strength is manipulated by a slight tug on a rein, and an immense fire can be set by a small blaze.

The tongue is a mighty instrument, which has, at times, praised God, aided man in dominating the earth, or precipitated destructive battles. Uncontrolled, it is an evil thing.

Why have you been quarreling? Is it contention, or lust, or envy? Can you not remember that he who seeks the world's benefits shall not know God's kingdom? Hasn't scripture told you that God embraces the humble and stands against the proud? Submit to God, repent, be humble, and be considerate of your brother.

Think not of tomorrow. The accumulation of wealth is folly, especially if, through greed, you have cheated others. Be patient, God will come very soon. Remember Job, who suffered, but

remained loyal. Remember how a merciful God rewarded him.

Do not swear by Heaven, or even by earth, or any other form. It is enough to answer "yes" or "no", for when you swear, you yourselves will be condemned.

Pray for the sick and tormented. Through prayer, the Lord will heal. Elijah, through prayer, prevented the rainfall for three and one-half years, and when he chose to, he prayed and brought the rain. You, too, must have faith in what you are doing.

Be an evangelist. Confess your sins to each other. Help your brothers who have faltered to return to God.

PETER

Comment

Church historians of the 1st and 2nd centuries assume Peter, the apostle, to be the author of this epistle. Polycarp, Irenaeus, Clement, Tertullian and Origen credit Peter with the work. About 63 A.D.

* * * * *

I PETER

From Peter, messenger of Jesus, To: God's chosen people who have been scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia, who have dedicated themselves as followers of Jesus Christ.

Peace to you all. Praise God who gave His Son to us and brought Him up from the dead. Rejoice and stay happy in spite of the harassments and embarrassments. Remember that metals tempered by fire are the stronger for having come through the test. You will be, also, to the glory of Christ.

For loving and believing in Him, even without having seen Him, you shall receive salvation of your soul. Salvation for your age was foretold by the prophets. Be ready. Jesus Christ will come again, and the reward will be yours. God planned the death of Jesus before creation of the world and it was only in this last age, and for you, that Christ was made manifest.

Now, joined together by your love for God, love also your brother Christians, for all of you are born again, undefiled, and immortal. Only those who have faith will share. As a chosen race — a priesthood for God, whom God has designated His holy nation — you have received His mercy in spite of the fact that once you were outcasts from Him.

Behave yourselves and live goodly lives so that you may set an example of your faith to the Gentiles. Respect authority and follow the civil laws of the land and the rules of the community. Give love to each other, revere God, and honor the local King.

Slaves, submit to your masters, without regard to whether they are kind or harsh. In doing so, you serve God, and you set an example for all to see and admire. Likewise, women must submit to their husbands. A wife's example to her heathen husband may make him a believer. Husbands, be considerate of your wives, of the weakness of her body, realizing that she shares with you the time God has allowed.

Seek not vengeance, but repay evil with kindness. Though you act justly and thereby suffer, do not worry. Remember that Christ also suffered and died for our sins. His body died, but His spirit rose from the flesh.

(The Spirit of Jesus, having risen, proclaimed the news to the

imprisoned spirits [these were the spirits of those sinful men who had lived in Noah's time]. The water which surrounded Noah's ark was a symbol of the baptismal waters through which one is redeemed. After all, baptismal waters are not for cleanliness. Through them a cleansing of one's conscience from sin is brought about because of the resurrection of Jesus. Now Jesus is in Heaven, upon His throne at the right hand of God, attended by angels who obey His every wish.)

You have already had your life of sin, of revelry and vice, of strong drink, idol worship, and whoring. Now, your life is to be peaceful and sedate, with time for prayer, dedication and meditation. Love one another above all else. Use the talent which God has given you in the common cause for the benefit of all. Persevere in the faith, the judgment is nigh.

I ask you who are elders to be diligent in caring for the members. I understand your problem, for I, too, am an elder. I personally witnessed Christ's suffering on the cross. Attend your duties; when Christ comes, you will receive a crown of glory. You younger men, of course, must pay attention to the words of your superiors and obey.

Watch out for Satan, who is ever ready to pounce on the weak and unwary.

Silvanus writes this letter for me and I affirm what it says. Greetings from our Church here, and from my son Marcus. Peace to Christians.

II PETER

Comment

The classification of II Peter as authentic scripture was early disputed. Eusebius declared it to be gainsaid. The decision to recognize it as Holy Scripture in the 4th Century was not unanimous. Written about 65 or 95 A.D., depending upon who was its author, it appears to have been copied by, or was a copy of portions of, Jude.

* * * * *

From Simon Peter, Christ's apostle, to all believers everywhere. Peace to you.

Through God, we receive everything. In His promises, we can become immune to the temptations of sin which surround us. Add works to your faith and establish your character with knowledge, humility, and love. Do that which may help you to become useful.

In testifying of our own personal experiences in our relationship with Christ, we related no fantasies. We were there on the holy mountain and heard God say "This is My Beloved Son in whom I am well pleased".

These things were predicted by the prophets, men who were guided by the Holy Ghost. Of course, there are false prophets and false teachers (many will follow them), and there will always be, but they will reap God's wrath on the Judgment Day.

God committed sinning angels to chains in the dark abyss to await judgment, flooded the world (in Noah's time) to destroy evil and most of mankind, and razed Sodom and Gomorrah. On the other hand, God has rewarded good, for He rescued Lot, and He can save us.

Doomed are the rebellious, flippant, defiant sinners who are indifferent to others, even the angels; these are the men who cursed and scoffed at others, engorged in licentious pleasures, seduced women and lusted after maidens. Doomed are the backsliders who, having once known the truth, have slipped and gotten themselves involved in sin again.

In this, my second letter, I have attempted to give you further food for thought, that you might ponder your future, and reflect upon your conduct. In the last days you will meet many who will pay no attention, sneering at any suggestion of the coming of Christ. They forget that the earth was once destroyed (by water). It will be destroyed again by fire. The time will come. One day is the same as a thousand years to God.

When God comes, the whole earth will be burned and the sun, stars, and heavenly bodies of the universe will melt away, to be seen no more. You have God's promise that there will be a new Heaven and a new earth. Keep the faith, as Paul has told you to do

(Paul is an inspired writer and it is unfortunate that so many are unable to understand what he says). Pay no attention to those teachers whose interpretation of scripture is different than ours.

May you grow in God's grace. Glory unto Jesus Christ.

I, II, AND III JOHN

John 1, 2, 3, written early in 2nd Century, finally canonized by the Church as the work of the apostle, John, in the 4th Century.

* * * * *

FIRST LETTER OF JOHN

We have seen Christ, the Word of Life. We bring Him to you as we received His message, and joyfully, we trust, in fellowship in the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ.

The message is: God is Light. We can live in the Light together, cleansed from sin by the blood of Jesus.

God has said that all of us have sinned. God is not a liar. For those of us who have sinned, and will sin, we have a mediator. He is Jesus Christ.

How can we determine that we have been justified? The answer is that we obey His word and love one another. Faith in Christ, alone, is not enough. If a man says he is living in the Light, but stays in the dark, he lies — and is not justified. As Christ lived, do ye likewise.

You have heard that there would be anti-Christ. You have already witnessed the coming of many anti-Christ, men who followed for awhile and strayed away, and others who deny that Jesus is God. Liars! Obviously, then, these are the last days.

We are God's children. Christ intended that we commit no sin, and if we be justified, he in us and we in Him, we shall not sin. For, he who is righteous is a child of God and the sinner is an agent of the Devil. After all, Jesus was created that He should destroy the Devil's works.

Therefore, he who sins is not a child of God. He who does not love his brother is not saved. A man with mayhem on his mind is not justified. Our religion is not just so much talk. When we are sinless, knowing that Christ dwells within us, we can look forward to God's coming.

Beware of some of the spirits. There are many false prophets. Those who teach that Jesus Christ came to us in spirit first, and is later expected in the flesh are actually anti-Christ, if the truth were known. Those worthy of belief will describe how Christ came in the flesh. Observe closely that you may be able to determine the wrong from the right.

Love one another as God loves us. God has placed His Spirit in us. He who does not love his brother cannot love God. He lies if he says he does.

Jesus came by water, blood and Spirit. Our rules allow us to accept claims as fact when attested by statements of one or more

human beings. Just think how much greater is God's claim, supported by witness of the Spirit, water and blood, three in all, who tell us that we have eternal life through God's Son.

Pray for each other that we shall not sin, for those born of God are not sinners. We know that the Son of Jehovah has come. Accept no substitute.

JOHN'S SECOND LETTER

The elder to the lady and her children.

Peace from God. I am pleased that your children are believers and following in the way we have taught them. Teach them to love one another. Watch out for the anti-Christ, the false teacher, who preaches that Jesus did not appear in the flesh. The children must follow what we have taught or they may lose their way.

Stay away from those who follow a different viewpoint. Don't let them come around you.

I hope to see all of you soon. Your sister's children send their greetings.

JOHN'S THIRD LETTER

The elder to Gaius. I pray that you are well. I have been hearing good things about you, that you are loyal to the faith and an example that others follow. Help our preachers when they come by. I wrote the Church, but I had no success with them as Diotrephes refuses to work with us. He is persuading the membership to lock out our evangelists. When I arrive, I am going to have it out with him before the Church.

Remember, my friend, that deeds are the proof of your justification. He who sins has not seen God.

Demetrius is admired everywhere.

I look forward to seeing you soon.

JUDE

Comment

Although Paul's appeal to Gentile audiences was based on the premise that they need not follow the Jewish law, he cited it often as authority for his message, even as proof that they were no longer bound by it. Jesus is pictured by the gospel writers as quoting Old Testament script.

The books of the Old Testament were not abandoned by New Testament scribes. They sought only to modify that portion which would prevent Gentile conversions or compel Gentile converts to comply with traditional Jewish ritual.

The Old Testament is quoted almost three hundred times in the New Testament.

Sometimes Christian writers were overzealous in citing Old Testament authority. The author of Jude cites material from "The Assumption of Moses" and the book of "Enoch", both of which were later declared by the Church to be Apocryphal works and omitted from accepted scripture. Consequently, many have frowned upon the inclusion of Jude in the Holy Book.

Traditionalists list Judas, brother of Jesus, at one time an unbeliever, as the author, 67 A.D. Those who dispute this claim put the time of the writing after 95 A.D.

* * * * *

A LETTER OF JUDE

From Jude, brother of James, to all those who believe in Christ. Peace to you.

I wish to warn all of you, and it is a matter of immediate importance, about those among our membership who are, if the truth be known, not one of us, but false teachers. They deliberately misinterpret the scripture, preach debauchery, and even disclaim Jesus Christ as our Savior.

Be wary of them. Listen to me.

Do you remember the Lord's wrath against the Israelites? Even though He had just saved them from the land of Egypt, He destroyed those who disbelieved. Do you remember the restless angels who disobeyed? They are now bound in chains, confined in the deep darkness where God has placed them to await His judgment on the final day. Can you recall the Lord's devastation of the sinful cities of Sodom and Gomorrah? Yet, many never learn.

So it is with these leaders who misinterpret the law. They claim justification and continue to lead immoral lives. They defy all authority, even the angels. How different it was when Michael, the Archangel, negotiating with the Devil for the body of Moses, said with humility to Satan: "May God rebuke you."

Enoch prophesied that God would come with His host of angels on the last day to judge the sinners. Christ's apostles predicted that in the final time evil, lewd, lustful men will appear, who will scorn any affirmation and argue and criticize any proposal. It is the way of these men to scorn that which they cannot explain.

Their selfishness will earn them just punishment.

Strengthen your faith. Pray. Seek God's love. Rescue from the abyss of Hell those who will listen. Hate sin. Glory to Jesus Christ, our Savior, and to God, forevermore. Amen.

REVELATIONS

Comment

Some of the literature used by several of the early Christian churches was unrestrained fantasy. Many of the books were falsely attested or bore the forged signature of an apostle. The Church leadership, in an effort to limit or prevent the use of suspect materials, met together and made selections. These were placed upon "Canon catalogues" and circulated among the early churches to apprise the membership of the texts recognized as divine.

Revelations, appearing about 125 A.D., was reluctantly received. It is missing from many of the early Canonical lists. However, as early as 300 A.D., it was included in the canons of some sources ahead of Hebrews, I and II Peter, James and John III. Origen and Eusebius accepted it. In 397 A.D., the Council of Carthage accepted all twenty-seven books of the New Testament though expressing doubt that Revelations was a trustworthy document.

The Eastern Churches were not convinced. They continued to exclude Revelations from their catalogues, or, in listing it, to name it as Apocryphal. As late as 806 A.D., the Constantinople Church listed Revelations of John, Peter, Barnabas, and Hebrews as gainsaid.

The question of authorship has also been a subject of controversy for centuries despite the claims of early Church leadership (Justin, Irenaeus, Tertullian, Clement of Alexandria) that the author was John of Zebedee. The nature of the material belies Judean creation. Nor does the mystical content lend credence to any claim that John the Elder of Ephesus was the author.

While there may be debate whether the works are of divine inspiration or as to the name of the writer, there should be little question regarding the origin of the material in the text, particularly in the latter pages.

One need only briefly examine compositions describing Persian mythology to recognize that the author of Revelations is not speaking of Paul's dogma (early embraced and enhanced by the Church) or the instructions of Peter or James, or even the gospel teachings of Jesus.

The writer (or writers) of Revelations is describing the doctrines of Zoroaster, originated by him in 600 B.C., and carried into the Western world by the followers of Mithra (cf. Zoroaster, page 152, *infra*).

Should this obvious influence upon the writing have prevented its inclusion in the Holy Book?

* * * * *

THE REVELATION OF JOHN

1: The matters related in this book are secrets told by God to Jesus Christ, who, in turn, gave the information to John. Later, God sent an angel to John to confirm that what had been delivered him by Christ was, indeed, God's Word. Listen to this account of events which will come about in the near future.

From John to the seven churches in Asia.

Grace and peace to you from God, who is, was, and will be, who sits on His throne before the Seven Spirits, and from Jesus Christ, the first born from the dead. From among the clouds Christ shall come. All eyes shall see Him, even those who crucified Him, and all shall sorrow.

Once, while worshipping upon Patmos Island (where I had been deported), I heard a loud, sharp voice say: "Write a description of what you are about to witness. Send it to the Churches at Ephesus, Smyrna, Pergamos, Thyatira, Sardis, Philadelphia, and Laodicea."

I looked around and saw seven golden candlesticks, upright, and from among them appeared Jesus, wearing a robe tied with a golden belt. His hair was white, His eyes were ablaze, and His feet shown as brightly polished brass. He held seven stars in His right hand. From His mouth extended a two-edged sword, and His face was bright with light.

Trembling, I fell before Him, and, in a thunderous voice, He spoke, "Do not fear Me, John. I am the first and the last, who died and was resurrected to live forever as the keeper of the keys of life and death, heaven and hell. Write down what I am about to tell you concerning what you are seeing."

Jesus directed: "Say this to the angel of the Ephesus Church:

"I, who hold the seven stars and walk among the seven golden candlesticks, know you very well. I appreciate your efforts to follow in the right path, but I am disappointed that you have lost some of your zeal.

"It is good that you despise, as I do, what the Balaamites are doing. Hear My promise. He who wins the fight against evil shall eat of the Tree of Life in the Paradise of God."

Jesus continued: "Put down these words for delivery to the Smyrna Church: I am He who is the first and the last, who was resurrected. Some of you will be tested; persevere, though you are thrown into prison. Be faithful unto death, and I will reward you with a crown of life."

Jesus, still holding the two-edged sword between His teeth, said: "Write the Pergamos Church thusly:

"I am well aware that your residence is surrounded by evil men. I am encouraged that you have endured. Yet some of you are following the Balaam doctrine, fornicating and eating food sacrificed to idols. Repent of your ways. If you fail in this, I will

attend to you; the sword I hold in My mouth will speak. For those who hold fast, there shall be manna from Heaven, and a new name chiseled on a white stone.

“And to Thyatira,” said Jesus, “write this: The Son of God — He whose eyes are afire and whose feet shine as polished brass — speaks to you in this letter. I acknowledge your loving ways, fidelity and service. But why do you allow that woman, Jezebel, to remain in your midst? She asserts the power of prophecy and then seduces My followers into fornication or teaches them to eat food sacrificed to idols. She will not repent. If she doesn’t change, I will kill her children and punish those who consort with her. The rest of you should pay no attention to what she is doing. Those who follow My teaching shall have the morning star and rule the nations.

“Write to the Sardis Church,” said Jesus, about whom was gathered the seven spirits, “tell them:

“I am fully aware of your weaknesses and your strength. You appear to be weakening. Renew your faith, reinforce your resolve. If you don’t change, I will come and punish you when you least expect it. Those who repent and strive for the right shall be written in the Book of Life and live forever. They will be robed in white and stay with the angels in my Father’s home, as one of Mine.

“To Philadelphia,” Jesus told John, “write:

“This writing is from the Holy One. I know you are weak, but you have tried. I’ll help. I will cause those liars in the next door synagogue who claim they are Jews to come crawling to you. For your obedience, I will save you from the calamities the world is presently destined to receive. Persevere in your belief, for I am coming very soon. He who stands true will become as a pillar in God’s Temple, with My God’s name upon him, in the New Jerusalem which will descend from Heaven.

“To the angel of the Church at Laodicea, write:

“This is from the True One. I know you. I loathe your apathy. Replenish your passion; repent and re-energize your wills. For he who heeds will be given a throne in Paradise.”

Then, said John, I saw a door open in Heaven, the Voice beckoned me, and a Spirit whisked me through the opening. Inside Heaven, I saw a throne, encircled by a rainbow, emerald in color. On the throne sat One shining as diamonds and precious gems. Twenty-four golden crowned elders, wearing white, sat on twenty-four thrones surrounding the Throne of Light. At the foot of the Throne of Light was a glass sea, like crystal, stretching endlessly away. Seven lamps of fire, the Seven Spirits of God, were affixed at the rear of the throne seat, each side. In the front of the throne sat four beasts:

Creature No. 1 appeared as a lion.

Creature No. 2 appeared as a calf.

Creature No. 3 had a human face.

Creature No. 4 appeared as an eagle with outstretched wings.

Each of the beasts had six wings, with numerous eyes peering from every part of their complete being, wings, feet and all, front and rear. The creatures sang, constantly, a song of praise of God to God. The elders, meanwhile, fell flat on their face before the Throne of Light, worshipping and praising the Lord God. This went on incessantly, night and day.

5: I beheld, then, a seven sealed book in the right hand of He who occupied the Throne. An angel asked for a worthy volunteer to open it. One of the elders suggested that the Lion could (the Lion from David of Judah).

A Lamb, having seven horns, seven eyes and scars over its body, approached the throne and plucked the book from the right hand of the Holder. The elders fell face down again, singing and praying that the Lamb was worthy to take the scroll from the hand of the One because He had shed His blood and died that all mankind would share God's kingdom. The angels sang, millions of them, glorifying the Lamb, while the elders, writhing on the floor, worshipped. The four creatures cried "Amen".

The Lamb broke the first seal — presto — there appeared a white horse upon which sat a rider with drawn bow. He was crowned and rode away. When the Lamb opened the second seal (at the orders of the second beast), there appeared from the scroll a red horse upon which sat a rider who had the power of making war. He was handed a large sword. The third seal was broken — this time a black horse popped out, bearing a rider holding scales.

One of the four beasts commented, "A coin for a measure of flour or three measures of barley, but no oil or wine."

The fourth creature beckoned when the fourth seal was broken and there emerged from the scroll a pale horse whose rider was called Death, and followed by Hell. Death was given power over one-fourth of the earth and the power to kill by war and plague. When the fifth seal had been opened by the Lamb, I could see an altar upon which were the souls of those who had been martyred in God's cause; I could hear their pleas wanting to know how much longer they would have to wait. They were given white robes and assured that martyrdom had not ended, but that the time would soon pass.

When the sixth seal was broken, the sun turned black and the moon red. The earth trembled with an earthquake and the stars fell to the earth; the mountains and islands moved. The kings of earth fled in terror into the mountains, seeking a place to hide from the wrath of the Lamb.

7: Then I saw four angels standing at the four corners of the

earth. Each of them was holding back one of the four winds. The sea was calm and the land was still. Another angel came from the East carrying the Seal of God. He called to the other four angels to restrain themselves in the exercise of their destructive powers until he had finished marking the foreheads of God's followers with the seal.

I heard him say the number that had been so marked. In Israel, there were a hundred and forty-four thousand, 12,000 from each tribe. Next, I could see great multitudes of people who had come from the ends of the earth and from every nation, all dressed in white robes, carrying palms and singing before the Lamb, "Glory to our God and the Lamb". The angels, elders, and the four beasts fell face down before Him shouting praises of Him.

Then one of the elders said to me: "These men in white robes are the justified — they have been cleansed in the blood of the Lamb. Never again will they hunger or thirst or become hot or cold. They will be in attendance upon God's throne forever, drink of the Living Waters, and go where the Lamb will lead them. They shall sorrow no more."

The Lamb broke the seventh seal. There was no sound. I waited, in mute awe, and in a little while I saw that the seven archangels were quietly given trumpets. Another came. With a golden censer, it (he) offered incense upon the golden altar. Then it dipped the censer into the altar fire, removed hot coals, and tossed them upon the earth. These ashes became thunder, lightning, and quakes as they fell.

The first angel blew his trumpet; hail and fire spewed forth and fell to earth, burning a third of the trees and all of the grass. The second angel trumpeted and a flaming mountain toppled into the ocean, killing one-third of the sea-life, sinking one-third of the ships thereon, and turning one-third of the ocean into blood. Sharply came the note from the trumpet of the third angel and a huge, burning star fell to earth, destroying a third of the rivers and springs, and poisoning the waters, from which multitudes died.

When the fourth angel trumpeted, a third of the sun, a third of the moon, one-third of all the stars, and one-third of the lightness of the day were extinguished. An eagle flew through the sky murmuring, "O, pity upon the men of earth when those last three angels blow their horns."

The fifth angel did blow and a falling star settled upon the earth. It (or He) held the keys to the abyss and opened the doors. Acrid and blackened smoke poured out of the opening, blotting out the sun and fouling the air. From the smoke flew swarms of locusts with scorpion stingers.

For five months the locusts searched the earth for those men who had not God's seal upon their foreheads, and finding them,

stung and tortured them, but did not kill them. The locusts appeared to have the body of a horse, a human face, long fine hair like a woman's, with teeth bared as a lion's and the stinging tail of a scorpion. They wore golden crowns and iron breastplates. They were the disciples of the Ruler of the Abyss, who is called, in Hebrew, Abaddon, or in Greek, Apollyon.

At the end of the five months, the sixth trumpet sung out its calamitous tones. A voice from the four horns of the golden altar directed the sixth archangel to release the four dragons which were bound at the Euphrates River. As soon as the dragons were untied, they organized and led an army of 200,000,000 cavalymen against mankind, annihilating one-third of the human race. The cavalymen were wearing orange, blue-green shields, astride horses having lion's heads bellowing smoke, fire and brimstone; the tails of the horses had heads on them also, like the head of a serpent, and from this headed tail still more miseries were dispensed.

Even after all this, those on earth who survived continued their evil ways of lust, greed, and idol worship, paying no attention to God.

Then I saw, coming from a cloud, still yet another angel, radiant and aflame and holding a small scroll. He set one foot upon the sea, the other upon the land, roared like a lion (seven thunders), and promised God's purpose would be revealed upon the sounding of the seventh trumpet by the seventh angel.

At the direction of heavenly voices, I took the small scroll from the hand of the angel, put it in my mouth, chewed and swallowed it. In my mouth it was sweet, but in my stomach it was bitter. Then they gave me a rod and sent me to measure the inner-court of the Temple of God. They told me to leave the outer-court of the Temple alone inasmuch as it had been given to the Gentiles who would overrun the city for three and one-half years. Two witnesses (the two represented by olive trees and candlesticks) would prophesy for that time.

(These fire-breathing witnesses cannot be hurt. They will have the power to control the weather, cause plagues, and change the waters of the rivers and oceans into blood. When the three and one-half years is ended, the Demon from the abyss will come out, kill them and leave their bodies on the streets of Jerusalem. The world will rejoice, but after three and one-half days God will restore them to life, and, in the presence of a stunned populace, the two will ascend into Heaven. As they ascend, the land will be shaken by earthquakes and storm, and a tenth of the city, including seven thousand people, will be destroyed.)

Then, at last, amidst heavenly shouts announcing the coming of Christ, came the sound of trumpet number seven. The twenty-four elders fell on their faces again, thanking and praising God as King, and praying for earth's destruction, judgment of the wicked,

and the reward for the good.

I saw, then, that God's Heavenly Temple was opened wherein lay the Ark of His covenant. From it, thunder rolled, voices screamed, and streaks of lightning lit up ominous skies from which fell great hailstones. The earth trembled.

12: Across the skys there stood a woman wearing the sun and standing on the moon, adorned with a crown of twelve stars. Expecting, she was, and as she labored for delivery, there came a mighty red dragon who positioned itself near the woman so that it might be able to swallow the child at its birth. Upon the seven heads of the ten-horned monster was seven crowns, and as it waited, it swished its tail and removed from the sky a third of the stars.

But when the male child was born to the woman (and it was He who would become the Ruler of all nations), it was quickly removed to God's throne while the woman ran into the wilderness (where she would live for the next three and one-half years).

Then came Michael and his angels and battled against the dragon and his angels. The dragon (who was really the serpent, Satan, the Devil) was worn down by Michael's forces, and pushed from Heaven to fall upon earth. An heavenly voice shouted, "We have won! The time of Christ has come."

Arriving upon earth, the dragon sought out the woman. But he could not catch her for the woman fled on two great wings, like an eagles, into the wilderness. Then the dragon sent forth a flood of water to search out the woman, but the earth intervened, swallowing the water so that it became an underground river. The dragon allowed that he would get his revenge upon her children.

A little while later, as I stood by the oceanside, there came from the sea a leopard-like beast with feet like a bears, and mouth like a lion. a seven-headed (one of the heads bore a severe scar) apparition with ten horns. The red dragon deputized the beast.

Men everywhere worshipped it. The beast ruled for three and a half years, during which time it continually cursed God. It attacked the believers.

(But be not alarmed. For whomsoever assaults you shall themselves be assaulted.)

There came another beast, this one from the bowels of the earth. Like a dragon it was also, having two horns and miraculous powers. People believed in it, and as commanded by it, shaped a statue of the first beast. The second beast then breathed life into the statue. It issued its decree that every man should receive its mark on the hand or forehead.

Figure this out. The beast's number is figurative of a man's name, being 666.

14: Of the world's population, only 144,000 had been saved. I saw these singing before the Lamb, led by the four beasts and elders, repeating a song only they understood. The Lamb stood on

Mount Zion. These hundred and forty-four thousand represented men who were pure virgins, undefiled by woman, honest and clean, believers in the cause.

An angel flew across the sky shouting "Fear and worship God, the Creator of all things." Then came another angel, crying out: "Babylon has fallen because she ravaged other lands." A third angel flew by, warning "He who worships the beast or its statue and is thereby marked by it on his forehead or hand, shall reap God's vengeance, and suffer Hell's fire and brimstone." Another heavenly voice directed me to write: "He who dies in the cause of Christ shall be rewarded."

As I stood transfixed, there soon appeared a white cloud, upon which sat the Son of Man, wearing a crown of gold and carrying a sickle. He stretched out his arm toward the earth and reaped a harvest. Another angel came with another sickle; he also thrust his sickle forward, and with a single sweep, harvested the fruit of the vine from the earth, and threw them into the winepress being operated by a fire angel. As the winepress turned, there came forth a river of blood which flooded the city to a depth of about six feet.

And yet still another event unfolded before my eyes. Seven angels, upon God's command, were going forth with seven plagues to carry to earth. As they departed, they sang the song of Moses and the song of the Lamb, "Great art Thou, God, true and Holy King over all."

I had not moved. I continued to look, and in a little while, Heaven's Tent of Testimony opened and out marched seven angels carrying the seven plagues. One of the four beasts gave each of the seven white-robed, golden-belted angels a smoking vial of God's wrath.

The first angel poured the contents of his vial upon the earth — lo — there appeared boils on all those men on earth upon whom were the mark of the beast. The second angel deposited his potion of death upon the seas, which turned to cold blood. All life therein was destroyed. The third angel used his deadly potion upon the rivers and springs of the earth and they, too, became blood. (I heard an angel say, "God's judgment is perfect justice as punishment to those who persecuted the Christians and prophets.)

The fourth angel cast his vial of liquid into the sun and flame shot forth burning men on earth. In pain, they cursed God's name and refused to honor Him. Angel number five plunged much of the earth into darkness when it tossed the vial's contents upon the beast's throne. Man, still, and even then, cursed their God for sending these agonies. Then the sixth angel emptied his bowl of poison in the mighty Euphrates River. It became dry, no longer a barrier to Eastern invaders.

(Then I noticed that there came from the dragon's mouth, the mouth of the beast, and the mouth of the false prophet, three frogs, possessed my many demons, who met with the kings of the world to do battle against God. — And this shall be called Armageddon,* — the day of the Lord's coming.)

Amid shouts of "end it all", the seventh angel discharged the deadly contents of his container and the earth shook with a mighty earthquake, the like of which it had never know. Cities were leveled and the great city was divided in three parts — islands and mountains disappeared. Hundred pound hailstones fell upon the people. And they cursed God for the suffering He had caused.

17: One of the angels led my spirit into the wilderness, and pointed. I looked. There, in all of her glory, sat the whore of whores, with whom kings had consorted and men from all nations had been inspired to lasciviousness. She was dressed in purple and scarlet, arrayed from head to toe in gold, pearls, and dazzling jewels. She was holding a golden cup filled with foulness, sitting upon a seven-headed, ten-horned, scarlet beast upon which was written names of blasphemy. She was drunk with blood of Christian martyrs and upon her forehead was written "Mighty Babylon, Mother of Harlots".

The angel explained: "The beast you see will someday rise from the Abyss and be sent into Hell. His seven heads represents seven hills and/or seven kings (five of these kings have already ended their reign, and one now holds office). The ten horns represent ten kings who are yet to rule. Each of them will engage the Lamb in battle and each will be defeated. The ten kings will soon despise the prostitute. They will rob her of her baubles, beat and burn her. The woman is figurative, symbolic of the great city that rules the nations of the earth."

Another angel, emanating a dazzling radiance, shouted, "Fallen is the mighty Babylon (Rome?)**, the home of demons, the subjector of innocent peoples, and citadel of trade for the earth's greedy merchants."

Another heavenly voice cried: "Leave this city, believers, for God's vengeance is promised. She shall suffer plagues of death, sorrow, starvation, and fire."

Kings, merchants, mariners, traders — all — shall weep at the loss of a great city, as believers, apostles, and prophets rejoice in God's vengeance. For Rome, there will be no more music, dancing,

* *Comment: From Megiddo, a common battleground in Samaria for warring armies of those days.*

** *Rome was the Babylon of the West and often referred to by that name.*

or singing; it is the end of industry, trade, and art. An angel tossed a stone into the sea as a symbol of the downfall of the city. The multitudes in heaven shout: "Glory unto God, whose judgment is perfect, who has, with vengeance, punished the great city."

The twenty-four elders and the four freakish beasts fell face down again before God and praised Him and re-praised Him, and heavenly voices praised Him. The angel told me that God says that those invited to the wedding supper of the Lamb will be blessed. I offered to worship the angel and he refused me, saying, "Worship God".

Heaven opened again and "Faithful and True" came riding by upon a white horse. A sharp sword extended from his mouth and a multiple-tiered crown adorned his head. His eyes were smoldering coals of orange and his robe was covered with blood. Some knew Him by the name "Word of God", but there was written upon Him a name which no one knew but He Himself. I could see that upon the side of His leg was written "King of Kings". A white-clad multitude upon white horses (heaven's squadrons) came behind.

An angel standing on the sun shouted to the winged vultures: "Be ready for your dinner. A feast awaits you. Many men will die in the battle which is about to take place. You shall have the flesh of kings and generals as well as animals and men."

Sure enough, in the distance, I could see the Evil one and the earth's armies led by their various kings, assembling for the battle with Heaven's armies.

The Evil one (beast) and false prophet were taken alive and thrown into the lake of fire and brimstone. The remainder of the men of earth's squadrons were slain by the sharp sword which protruded from the mouth of "Faithful and True".

And the birds ate.

Then an angel from the heavenly way came with a chain and the key to the Abyss. He tied the dragon with the chain, lowered him into the Abyss, and sealed it with a seal to last a thousand years. At the end of that time, the dragon will again be set free, but only for a short time.

I saw the souls of those who had been beheaded because of their fidelity to God. They were sitting upon thrones, reigning with Christ. Of the dead, they alone are resurrected at this time; the remaining dead will not be resurrected until the end of the thousand years. So he who is martyred in behalf of God's cause is indeed fortunate, for it is he who shares in the first resurrection. They are God's priests and shall reign with Christ for the thousand years.

When the thousand years have ended and Satan is loosed again, he will again arouse the nations to battle against God. Gog and Magog will accompany them. The army so gathered shall attack Jerusalem, only to be defeated by the fires of Heaven. The

Devil will be sent into the lake of fire with the beast and the false prophet, in everlasting, perpetual torment.

From a magnificent white throne, the Great One sat in judgment. The dead from the ends of the earth and depths of the sea stood before Him. The Great One consulted the Book of the Dead and the Book of the Living. The dead were judged from the books according to their works. He whose name was not found in the Book of the Living was cast into the lake of fire with Death and Hell.

21: Heaven and earth faded from view — there appeared a new Heaven and a new earth, an earth without oceans. A new, shining city, Jerusalem, descended slowly from Heaven while a voice shouted: "Finally, God may dwell among men. He shall comfort them, and there shall be no more death, tears, or pain."

The One, from His throne, commanded me: "Write this, that I am the A and the Z, the beginning and the end. For he who is victorious shall receive the gift of everlasting waters, but he that fails shall suffer the second death in the lake of fire."

One of the angels beckoned me and my spirit went with him. He carried me to a high mountain where we were able to look down on the Holy City of Jerusalem, the New Jerusalem, shining radiantly as a diamond in the clear air. Its walls were thick and high. It had twelve gates, at which were stationed twelve angels, and over each of which was written the name of one of the twelve tribes of Israel.

There were three gates facing each direction; the foundation stones of the wall, twelve in all, bore the names of the twelve apostles. The angel, with gold measuring rod, showed me that the city was 12,000 furlongs square (and high). The wall was 144 cubits thick, built of precious gems; the city itself was of pure gold.

Twelve different kinds of jewels ornamented the walls, including diamond, emerald and topaz. Each of the twelve gates were made from a single pearl. The streets, of course, were clear gold. The city had no temple. There was neither sun nor moon for it stood in God's light — there will be no night.

No one shall enter who is defiled.

The angel showed me the everlasting waters, flowing clean and clear from God's throne as a river down the street of Jerusalem. On each side of the river stood a tree of life. (It yields a different kind of fruit each month.) God's throne and the Lamb shall be there in Jerusalem, and the occupants of the city shall wear the names of these Holy Ones on their foreheads.

The angel turned to me and said, "Really, I am telling you the truth about all of this. God has sent me to tell you He is coming very soon."

You who heed what I, John, am telling you are fortunate.

Believe me, when I saw these things myself, I was so impressed that I tried to worship the angel who was my guide. He told me that I must worship only God. He asked me to tell others and keep none of it secret, because the day of judgment was near.

He said, "I am coming soon to judge every man according to his works. I am the beginning and the end.

"You who have kept His commandments — Rejoice! for you will partake of the Tree of Life and enter by the gates of the city. Outside the walls there will be sorcerers, fornicators, murderers, and sinners, who cannot enter.

"I, Jesus, have sent my angels to give this information to the Churches. I am the root and offspring of David, the Morning Star. Come, you who are thirsty, the water is free."

Warning: He who adds to this book shall be accursed with plague; he who takes away therefrom shall not share in the Tree of Life and the Holy City.

Jesus promises: "Yes, I am coming soon."

And I say, "Amen, come, Lord Jesus."

REVERIE

Is the Judo-Christian explanation of God and creation satisfactory?

Is the answer elsewhere?

What about Brahminism, the creed of the Hindu, its world soul, caste system and Nirvana, whereby the good are reincarnated in successive steps to the priesthood before finally merging as one with the world soul?

Or Islam? Is it really true that the black stone enshrined in Mecca was carried from Eden by Adam and handed down from generation to generation to Ishmael, son of Abraham? Can Mohammed be the prophet of Allah? Did Gabriel deliver to Mohammed stone tablets upon which were written God's messages? Did the mountains dance and the trees sing the night Mohammed was born?

May one rely upon the Bibles of Buddha, which say that Good comes from good, and evil from evil? Did the world *always* exist, as Buddhists claim? Has Buddha already lived more than five hundred lives? Is he living somewhere now, as a God, or king, or ordinary person?

Is there truth in Shinto? Jainism? Sun Worship?

What about atheism, which denies the existence of a creator altogether? Can our intelligence accept the proposition that the wonderful order of the universe and the marvelous nature of ourselves is nothing more than accident? And from whence came the ingredients for the accident?

* * * * *

Where is the proof of the nature of our origin? Our destination?

Has God revealed the answers to us in this Book? Does He still withhold them?

* * * * *

And if we knew?

If the infinite were within our knowledge, would we be satisfied — even then?

* * * * *

— Andrew